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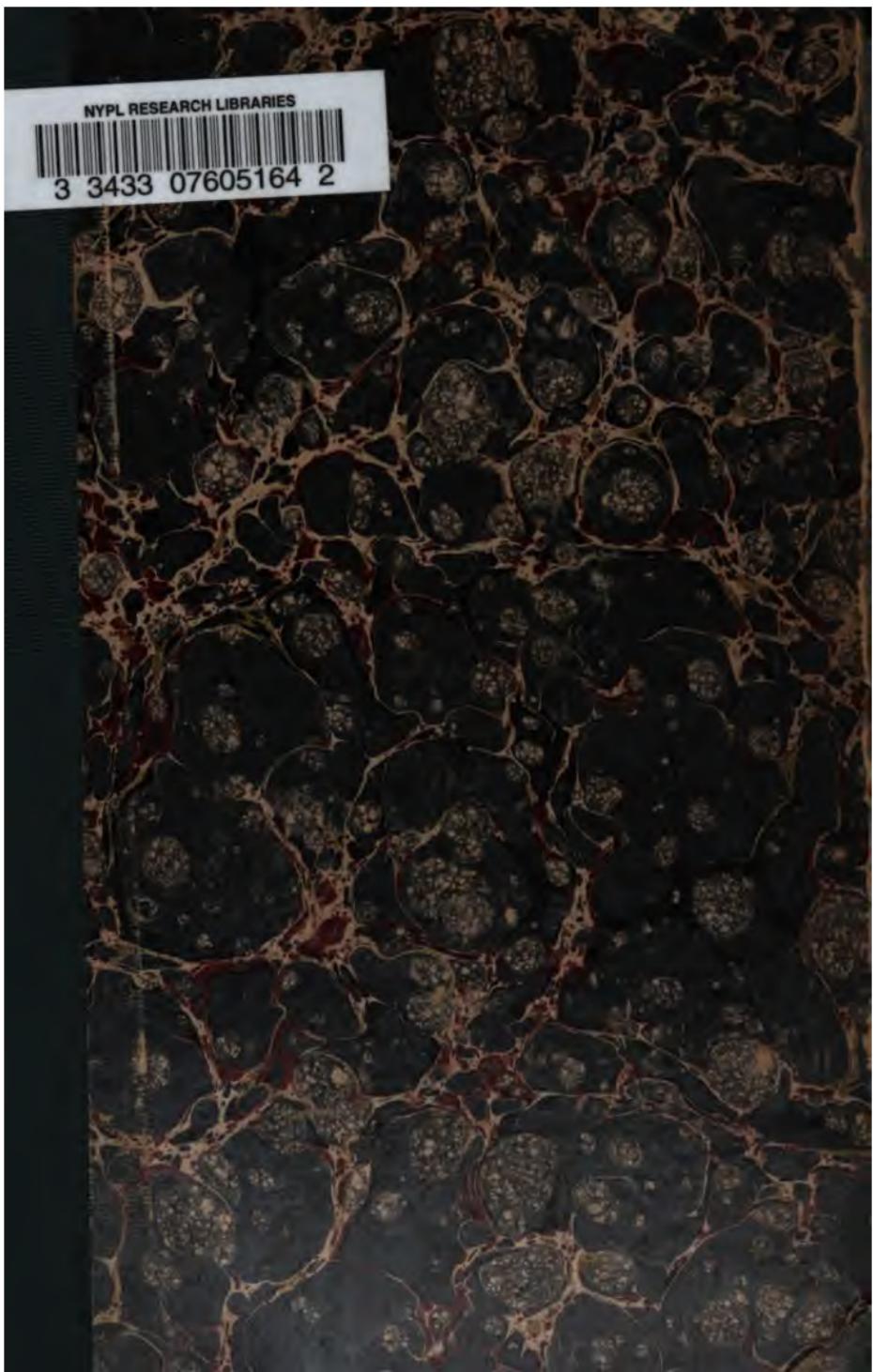
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**A GENTLEMAN JUROR.**



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# A GENTLEMAN JUROR

BY

CHARLES L. MARSH,

AUTHOR OF /

"OPENING THE OYSTER."



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# A Gentleman Juror.

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## CHAPTER I.

### ST. VALENTINE'S DAY.

The fourteenth of February was not a holiday for the employés of Coldart & Goolie, wholesale grocers and commission merchants of the City of Compos. The sun, after many days of wary approaches and slowly increasing fervor, once more dared to claim the northern world as his valentine, but his triumphant smile was unheeded by the dozen clerks who posted books, footed long columns of figures, sing-songed the checking of balance sheets, and with never-failing consciousness of the presence of Ralph Sconer, the office chief, hurried or plodded through the work whose strained lines were all in his grasp.

But the thirteenth clerk seemed to have broken or cast off his leading string.

He was a man about fifty years old, with iron-gray hair and beard. With back half-turned to his unfinished work and with elbow on the desk, he sat looking dreamily through the window. Beyond the end of the opposite building, above the moving drays and the heads of the hurrying passers, he saw a wide reach of the river, dancing blue and bright in the sunshine, gray and silent in the long, irregular shadows of building and wharf and vessel. And beyond the river he saw the white glare and twinkle of sun-lit snow. He was thinking of the shifting colors of the picture and how to catch and reproduce *that swift gleaming of the water.*

"*Mr. Morliss, will you kindly step here a moment?*"

Ralph Sconer's voice was neither loud nor harsh, but the dreamer started like a detected school-boy, and in the momentary silence and under the glances of twelve pairs of eyes, slowly made his way to Mr. Sconer's desk.

"What is it, Ralph?"

With the shadow of a frown, Mr. Sconer answered:

"Mr. Morliss, I wish you would take these claim papers down to the shipping-clerk and ask him to check the shipments again. You remember the case—and, Mr. Morliss," with his hand on the other's arm he leaned forward and lowered his voice to a whisper, "be prompt. Mr. Coldart has been watching you from the private office."

With a sudden flush the clerk murmured: "Thank you, Ralph," then added, explosively: "Yes, sir, at once, sir," and hurried from the room.

As he turned again to his desk Ralph whispered to himself: "Poor old man. His art dreams will ruin him in spite of all I can do."

The good St. Valentine had not forgotten Messrs. Coldart and Goolie, for at this moment, as the clock struck four, an express messenger arrived with a small, compact parcel for which Ralph Sconer receipted, and which he at once took to the private office.

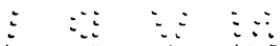
Then along the desks ran a ripple of long breaths, and a stretching and shifting of positions ensued, with an undertone of conversation which was not the monotonous calling and recalling of numbers. But twenty-four wary eyes kept watch of the glass partition and the open door of the private office, and no clerk felt that he had enough slack rein to enable him to get down from his high stool to the floor.

Meantime the private office had taken up the tale of numbers, and Ralph Sconer's voice was heard, counting:

"Five hundred, one thousand, two, three, thirty-five, four, forty-five, five, six, seven, eight, nine, one, two, three, four, five, ten, ten thousand."

Then the small, shrill voice of Mr. Goolie, the junior member of the firm, repeated the count slowly and to the same conclusion, whereupon Mr. Coldart remarked:

"Put the package in the vault, Mr. Sconer. It is too late to bank it to-night."



As Ralph left the private office Morliss stood near the door waiting for him.

"I have checked over the papers with the shipping clerk, Mr. Sconer."

"One moment, Mr. Morliss," said Ralph, "let me dispose of this package first."

As Ralph Sconer stepped to the heavy vault door and swiftly manipulated the combination, the twelve clerks watched him covertly, Morliss watched him carelessly, and Mr. Coldart, with Mr. Goolie as a close second, watched Ralph, watched Morliss, and watched the clerks.

One of the boys in a moment of extraordinary relaxation had once said that the synonym of Coldart and Goolie was Janus, for which he gained but slight applause, even after the necessary explanation.

At five o'clock, while the pulse of the office was throbbing with the hurried, nervous action that precedes the death of a day's work, the sharp bell from the private office summoned the boy, and the boy presently appeared with the shrill cry:

"Mr. Morliss wanted in the office."

Past winks and the covert wagging of heads the old man made his way. For an instant he paused at Ralph's desk with a glance that met no response. Ralph was immersed in his papers, and carefully avoided looking away from them.

"Mr. Morliss," said the senior partner, "I have been speaking of you with Mr. Goolie. Mr. Goolie thinks that you are not quite adapted to such work as we require, and while we both esteem you personally, Mr. Goolie thinks that it is not for your interest or for ours that you should remain with us longer."

"Mr. Coldart thinks," interposed the squeaky voice of the junior partner, "that you would do better for yourself in some more congenial employment."

The old clerk flushed and hesitated, and then gathering courage began: "Gentlemen, I have been with you for nearly a year, and I have tried hard to do my duty. I am aware that I have often failed, but I am learning better daily. I have a family, Mr. Coldart. If you would kindly talk with Ralph—with Mr. Sconer—"

"There, there, Mr. Morliss," said the head of the firm

"We will not discuss the matter. You will please report to Mr. Sconer and draw the balance due you to-night. We wish you all success in your next position. Good evening!" and the old man passed out of the private office, and with head bowed and no glance at Ralph or at any clerk, once more wearily climbed on his stool and once more gazed through the window. But the sun had gone, and the river was all gray and cold, and he saw no picture, for a dark cloud closed about him and rose within him and blinded his eyes with its moisture.

A hand upon his shoulder aroused him. He turned and for a moment looked blankly around the empty office, then mechanically took the outstretched hand of Ralph Sconer.

"Don't be down-hearted, Mr. Morliss," said Ralph, cheerily. "Of course, it's hard luck, but this isn't the only place in the city. I can help you to find another."

"Ralph," said the old man, "you are a right good fellow, and I know I am an old crank; but I can't help it. I tell you, sir, I can't help it. You got me this place. You kept me in it. You have done all you could to make it easy for me. I know it all. I have been careless, stupid, worthless—I can't help it. I can't help crying out all the time against this dull, senseless drudgery. I want my art, Ralph—I can paint—I know I can paint—I must think of it at least."

"But, Mr. Morliss," said Ralph, "isn't it better that you should have to cry for your art than that your wife and daughter should have to cry for your support?"

Morliss turned quickly and grasped the other's hand, this time warmly.

"My daughter, Ralph, my little Louise—yes, bless her—yes, you are right, Ralph—you are right. I am selfish," and his voice trembled. "My little girl would forget everything for me. Help me again, Ralph, help me to a new position—anything—I will try again. I must work—I must have money," and he lowered his voice as if confiding a secret. "Ralph, I know you love my little girl—you will win her, my boy—but you won't take her quite from me, will you? You will let me live with you, and then I can paint. I could make money, Ralph, if only I had time to work."

A smile and a frown struggled for a moment on Ralph's face, and then he answered, slowly:

"Mr. Morliss, I do love your daughter. If I could win her, I think the world would be bright for us all. But now—we must work—we must all work. We must not dream of the future—neither you nor I. To-morrow I will look for a new position for you. Will you try to keep it?"

"I will, Ralph, I will try to forget everything but the work I have to do."

"Your hand upon it! There, it's a bargain. Here is the twenty-five dollars due you for the two weeks. Go home, Mr. Morliss. Don't be discouraged. Good night!"

Morliss reached the door and turned.

"Ralph, will you come up to-night?"

Ralph half smiled and answered:

"Yes, I will come, Mr. Morliss. Good night!"

"Good night," and the door closed. And Ralph leaned his head on his hand and said to himself: "Poor old man, I know why he wants me to-night. Too bad! too bad!"

For some ten minutes Mr. Ralph Sconer sat looking straight before him. However unpleasant some of his reveries may have been, the conclusion was obviously cheerful, for as he started to his feet he began whistling and stepped briskly to his desk, which he closed with a bang. Then glancing around the room he put on his coat and hat and left the office, still whistling.

As he paused for a moment at the street door at the foot of the single flight of stairs, a man in working clothes stepped forward, evidently waiting for him. It was growing dark.

"Hulloo, Ralph!"

"Hulloo, father, haven't you gone yet?"

"I was waiting for you, Ralph."

"Well, here I am. Let's go home."

"No, I'm not going home yet, boy. I want you to let me have some money."

"What do you want of so much money, father? You get fifty dollars a month as porter here, and you have your room and board with me, and you are always asking

me for more money. What is it, father?" and the young man seized him by the shoulder. "You're not gambling, are you?"

"Never you mind what I'm doing, sonny. I do my work here all right, don't I? You don't hear any complaints of me. I keep a-hustling your damned boxes and barrels, don't I? I'm always on time in the morning, ain't I? I'm here till quitting time, ain't I? And I don't spend the time looking out of a window and thinking about pictures, do I? Eh? Sonny—now you just let me have a twenty."

The allusion to the window and the picture was bad policy in Mr. Sconer, senior. His son replied gravely:

"I think I've given you money enough lately, father. If you come home with me to supper you won't need any money to-night—at any rate, I can't spare any now."

"Oh, you can't spare any? For a boy that gets three thousand a year you're pretty hard up. You don't gamble, do you?"

"You forget, father, that I got you this position and you wouldn't have a dollar except for me."

"Don't talk to me about position. I earn my money, every cent of it, and you know it. Come, Ralph, let me have that twenty. I need it bad to-night."

"No twenty!—no, nor twenty cents. Come home with me."

"I'll come home when I damn please, young man! You go your way and I'll go mine," and the senior slouched off down the street, while Ralph buttoned his coat and walked to the car. No whistling.

Ralph was not acquainted with his father. A child who discovers a parent after eighteen or twenty years is not apt to be familiar with all the good and bad points of the man who, under common conditions, is the guide and instructor, for good or bad, of the boyhood and youth of a son.

Ralph's mother had died when he was three years old. The boy had been intrusted to the care of relatives in the country, who had trained him to the strictest honesty and steadfastness of purpose, but who could not teach him *imagination or ideas of anything beyond honest money-getting, because they were not themselves endowed with*

the kind of sentiments which are occasionally foolish and very often annoying.

But Ralph had prospered under their training, and had come to Compos fired with the determination to succeed in business, and incidentally to find a father who had been vaguely referred to by his guardians as a man who worked in Compos. Ralph had succeeded in reaching the position of manager at Coldart & Goolie's, and in the intervals permitted by the arduous duties which his personal ambition imposed upon him, he had looked for his father. He had found him a year before the events with which this story opens, and Mr. Sconer, senior, had cheerfully resigned his employment as chance laborer on the docks to accept the steady occupation and regular meals which his dutiful son was ready to offer him.

So there was not the close acquaintance between them which might have obtained under other conditions. Even with the best environment it takes a wise son to know his own father, and the converse of Solomon's proposition is also true.

Meantime Morliss was well on his way homeward. He was an active man, fond of open air and exercise and unusually strong, and he scorned the street car for a distance that could be covered by twenty minutes of brisk walking.

But there was no briskness or elasticity in his step on that night. His uneven, excitable nature had received a shock which had started his spirits swiftly downward. Some hours of time or some unexpected pleasure were necessary before the inevitable rebound. And he foresaw no pleasure in the home-coming before him.

With the strength of his mood he dreaded even the meeting with his daughter, tender and cheering as he knew he would find her. And he shrank from the tongue of his wife as the blistered flesh shrinks from the lash.

More and more slowly he walked, and at last stood still at the corner of a vacant lot. Before him were the dark walls and grated windows of the State Penitentiary and the silver flash of the moon-lit river. Behind him, only two blocks away, was the little cottage that he called home.

*Leaning against the rough board fence, he looked long*

at the prison. Then he said aloud, with the tone of a man who is tired of a discussion and wishes to silence his opponent: "Yes, sir, that's all there is about it. I would rather go over there and be put in a cage alone than to go home to-night," after which determined utterance he turned his back to the prison and plodded slowly along the shaky wooden sidewalk toward home.

The lamp in the window, placed there by his daughter's hand, was for him alone, and he knew it, but its narrow ray of light did not gladden him. Then, as he drew near the house and doggedly raised his eyes, the girl's slight figure outlined against the light from the open door caused the moment of swift joy which he had half longed for and half dreaded.

And the fresh young voice that called him through the night seemed like a note of rescue.

The loving instinct of the woman had heard trouble in that slow, heavy step, and without thought or purpose of her own, love guided her to its relief.

As she stood on the top step and cried, "Catch me!" the old man opened his arms and felt a glow of strength and happiness as he whirled the little figure in the air, and clasped her to his heart.

"Old dada," she whispered, "you are late. Aren't you glad to come home to me?"

He carried her up the steps and into the hall, and then, as she stood with her hand on his arm, he said slowly:

"Dear little girl—yes, I am glad, always glad, but I am shamed again, dear. Your old father is of no use—no one wants him."

And so she knew at once that he had been discharged, and with no thought but to cheer him, she said: "Poor old dada, and you are feeling blue because you can't sit in that musty office any more. You will get a better place, father, and while we are finding it, you can paint. To-morrow you must work on that lovely river scene, and I want to study it with you. Don't you think you ought to have more in the foreground—some figures or boats, or something?" and Miss Artful turned with her father's coat and hat in her hands and looked at him as if that question must be decided between there and the hat rack.

*And the old man was a willing victim to her guile.*

"No, no, dear, you don't understand. The whole strength of the picture is in its simplicity. The wide sweep of the river with the play of sunshine and shadow—there must be nothing in the foreground to distract the attention. I will show you to-morrow, dear. Oh! I think I can make a grand picture of that."

You touched the chord too strongly, my little lady. Its resonance has reached the next room and has awakened something inharmonious, for now a hard, peevish voice is heard:

"John Morliss, I think when you get home half an hour late you might come straight to your supper and not stand there talking about your worthless pictures. Louise, can't you bring him in?"

And the old man plunged once more into the deep waters and stretched out a feeble hand to his daughter, as he whispered:

"You tell her—I—I think I must go out after supper."

The girl took her father's hand and laid it against her own soft cheek as she said:

"You dear old chicken-heart, yes—of course I will tell her. Come, let's face the music bravely," and together they walked into the dining-room.

Mrs. Morliss was a tall, angular woman of forty, with a face that had once been beautiful, now marked deeply with the lines of disappointment and discontent. Her large dark eyes seemed miserably unsuited to the look of sullen anger that usually smoldered in them, only flashing into fire under the quick impulse of a violent temper.

Her daughter had the same eyes, but there was no trace of sullenness in them. They shone with the kindly, gentle enthusiasm of the father.

"Late again! always late! Late to work in the morning, late to supper at night! Always late—always lazy—always mooning about your miserable daubs that take the bread from the mouths of your family. No sense of shame or self-respect."

The old man sat with head bent over his plate, nervously kneading the bread into pellets. The daughter's eyes kindled as she resolutely faced her mother.

"Mother, please don't be hard on poor father to-night.

He is unhappy now, and he needs comfort and sympathy—not reproaches."

The storm was rising, and the harsh, peevish voice rose with a blighting note of scorn.

"Poor father! yes, always poor father! Sympathy! and what sympathy should a man have that deserts his own family—that would look on and see them starve if only he could have a miserable paint brush and moon and maunder over his dirty canvass. Sympathy! Does any one have any sympathy for me? You don't care if your mother works from daylight till dark—yes, and from dark till daylight, to keep you and that worthless man. It's always 'poor father!' Never poor mother. Poor slave! that's what it should be. Twenty years a slave—nothing but drudge—drudge—for a good-for-nothing man and a thankless daughter. But I don't deserve sympathy. I was a fool to marry such a man. John Morliss, I would give a thousand dollars if I had never seen you."

And Morliss raised his eyes for a brief instant and looked at her, and said to himself, with a swift, grim humor: "I would gladly raise you a thousand on that." But he uttered not a word, and as his glance turned toward his daughter it softened and lingered, and he thought, "I am glad that I married her."

But Louise, with a heightened color and a repressed quiver of indignation in her voice, said: "Mother, you are unjust to father. Think a moment. Hasn't he always worked for you and for me at anything he could get? Doesn't he give up his dearest wishes for our sake? And isn't he always kind and gentle and uncomplaining? Why are you so cruel, mother? You were not always so."

She was at her mother's side. "Mother," and an arm stole around the half-yielding neck. "You love me and you love father—you know you do. You used to be so tender and sweet to me when I was little. Don't you remember? And we were all happy then, but we didn't have any more money then than we do now. Why can't we be happy again? Let us all try, mother? Will you?"

And the mother still had the mother love, half-congealed as it was. It thawed a little under that warm caress. She met her daughter's kiss as if ashamed of

yielding, and said: "There, dear, I know you are a good girl, and I am sorry I talked, but I am so tired and nervous, Louise, and I am so worn out with hoping for something better. John, don't be angry. You know how worried I always am about you."

So a tottering peace was erected, only to be cast down and shattered in a moment.

"And now, mother dear," said Louise, "I have something to tell you. Father and I think it is good news, and you will think so, too, won't you? You know father has been miserable at Coldart & Goolie's, and has earned only a little money, with no chance of any advancement. I have wished for a long time that he could have some pleasanter situation. Well, mother, now please don't be angry. He has had to leave there to-day, and to-morrow he will look for a better place."

It is not necessary that the reader should suffer even a fraction of what Morliss and his daughter suffered during the next ten minutes. A storm of pent-up anger and disappointment was let loose and swept upon them with hurricane force. The dark eyes flashed with a consuming fire and not even the steady appealing look of her daughter that met her own unflinchingly could subdue or check that volcanic outburst.

The old man at first bowed before the storm. Then slowly he recovered. His face grew set and hard, his forehead contracted, and from under his heavy eyebrows his eyes, usually soft and timid, looked at his angry wife with an unwavering stare of concentrated hate.

At last the climax was reached: "You have been discharged. Then you have been paid. Give me the money at once."

And Morliss sat motionless, with that same unwinking gaze, and said nothing.

"Do you hear me? Give me that money, you miserable, shiftless"— And then Morliss spoke, without moving:

"I hear you, woman; I am not deaf. I will *not* give you the money—not one dollar."

"What! You shall give me that money. It is mine," and she stepped toward him, but a firm hand grasped her arm, and the pale face of her daughter was close to her own, and now her angry eyes must droop before that cold, commanding look.

"Mother," the voice was soft and low, but without a trace of tenderness, "sit down—you have said too much. He shall not give you the money. I will not have it. Do you understand? He shall not," and the mother, cowed and exhausted, sank back into her chair, and with her face bowed in her hands, burst into a fit of sobbing.

The jingle of the door-bell was heard. "Father," said Louise, quietly, "will you go to the door? Mother will feel better soon."

Mr. Morliss opened the front door to admit Ralph Sconer.

"Come in, Ralph," said he, wearily. "You have missed the overture but there is good promise of more music. Louise, dear, it is Ralph Sconer," and Louise answered, in her cheeriest voice, "Sit down with father a few moments, Ralph; I will come in as soon as I clear the table."

The mother had suddenly stopped crying. Her eyes had lost their fire, and resumed the old sullen look. She was nervously wiping her face with her handkerchief.

"Mother, dear, please go and lie down—I will clear the table."

"No, Louise; you go and see Ralph. I don't want you to help me. I can do the work—I always do the work. That's all I'm good for. No, no, I won't let you stay. Go quick, or I shall be nervous again," and she began to gather up the dishes, muttering sullenly to herself.

Louise watched her for a moment; then went into the little parlor, and shook hands with Ralph.

"I was just telling your father not to take it to heart too much," said Ralph. "I think I can find him a much better place to-morrow."

"You are always kind, Ralph," said the girl. "Father and I are not a bit discouraged. I am glad to have him away from that work. It worried and distressed him, and made us all uncomfortable, and you know mother isn't well."

"Yes, I know," said Ralph.

"But now we are free again, and something will come soon to make everything brighter—don't you feel so, father?"

"Nothing can come to make things darker, my dear," said her father.

"Oh, yes; lots of things. We might be sick, or you might get hurt, so you couldn't work. There's no serious trouble yet, is there, Ralph?"

"Not a bit of it," said Ralph. "There's plenty of hope and plenty of happiness left for us all."

And so these two sought to cheer and encourage the old man, and he sat and looked mournfully at the paintings that covered the walls. Paintings, alas! that he had never seen hung anywhere except in his own house.

Mrs. Morliss appeared, and bowed stiffly to Ralph, and her ill-nature at once turned upon him.

"I think, Mr. Sconer, you might have prevented John's discharge. I know you are all-powerful there, and I did think you were our friend."

"Not quite all-powerful, Mrs. Morliss. I can't overrule the firm. It was an act of gross injustice; but I think it will be a good thing for Mr. Morliss in the end."

"Yes, a good thing! Perhaps you might think it a good thing to be idle, with the money that you have. Poor people can't afford such luxuries."

"Louise," said Mr. Morliss, suddenly rising, "I am going out for a walk. No! you stay here, Ralph. I shall not be gone long," and his daughter followed him into the hall.

"Father, dear, please don't go out to-night."

"I must, little girl; I can't stand it any longer. I must walk off my temper, or I shall say something to be sorry for. Here, dear, here is the twenty-five dollars that I wouldn't give to her. You keep it, and use it as you know how—for the best."

"But, father, please stay."

"No! good-night, dear—kiss me, sweetheart."

"Ralph, please come and persuade father not to go."

"No, Ralph; it's no use," said Morliss, as Ralph appeared. "Don't talk to me. I want to get out and walk—walk fast and think hard. Ralph," and he whispered in his ear, "I am well-nigh desperate—I must think—I must get some money—some way—I must get it, if only to flaunt it in the face of that woman."

"Tut, tut, man," said Ralph, with a laugh; "don't talk nonsense. Take a little walk around the block—walk hard—shake yourself. Laugh at yourself. Come back and laugh with us."

And the old man went out, and walked straight into the meshes of the net that circumstance, chance, fate—what you will—had spread for him.

"It will do him good," said Ralph, as they returned to the parlor. "A little brisk walk on a winter night is the best cure for the blues. Don't you think so, Mrs. Morliss?"

"Some people's blues are very easily cured, Mr. Sconer. Louise, my head aches badly, and I think I must ask Mr. Sconer to excuse me."

And Mr. Sconer rose and said he was very sorry, and thanked God in his heart.

Then these two sat down and talked of—the weather; the last book which Ralph had brought; the last concert to which Ralph had taken her, and of Mr. Morliss—never of Mrs. Morliss.

Louise was nineteen. Of course she knew that Ralph was in love with her, and of course she was glad of it. She did not know whether she loved him—perhaps because he had never yet asked her.

In the household she was commander-in-chief. Though but a little girl, greatness had been born in her, and had been thrust upon her. She had become doubly great—great in the enthusiasm and idealism of her father, which found its expression in her devoted love and glorification of the father himself, and great in the acquired and masterly tactics by which she preserved at least a truce between the incompatible dispositions of her father and mother. Her enforced task had grown with her growth, and become a part of her, and any inherited selfishness of the father or sullenness of the mother had been choked in infancy by the stronger roots of love, and of duty enforced by love and necessity. She had had no time to think of possible happiness for herself aside from the happiness of seeing her father happy, and her father and mother at peace.

When an hour had passed and Mr. Morliss did not return, Louise became silent and abstracted.

"Ralph," she said, at last, "I haven't heard a word you were saying. What can have become of father?"

"Why, nothing alarming, Louise. He found he needed a little more time to get his courage back, that's all. He'll turn up in a few minutes," and then, with the usual stupidity of mankind, he reflected—"She is tired, poor little girl, and I am boring her. She doesn't know what I am saying. She would *rather be alone*," and so he arose briskly, and when Louise

said, "Are you going, Ralph?" he replied, "Yes; I have a lot of work to do to-night," which was a lie.

And Louise thought, "He doesn't want to stay," and Ralph thought, "She wants to get rid of me," and they said "Good-night!" with a positive misconception and misunderstanding on both sides and all sides, and Ralph departed with no thought of Morliss, but with gloomy thoughts of his daughter, and Louise got some sewing and sat down with a few moments of regret and resentment directed at Ralph, and then with hours of weary anxiety and breathless listening for her father.

The first sounds of the morning rumbled over the wooden pavement. Then another wagon passed. A few sleepy voices were heard on the street. The daylight stole in slowly and struggled with the gas-light.

The gas-light grew dim.

The father had not returned.

## CHAPTER II

### INTO THE NET

When John Morliss left the house he had no definite aim in view. He wanted to escape for a time—to get into the air and breathe a little freedom, if only as a respite. With a mind intensely preoccupied by angry thoughts, he followed his regular daily route down the wooden sidewalk toward the corner. Half-way along he noticed a particularly dilapidated length of the generally dilapidated board fence. He had seen that same length of fence some eight hundred times before, and it had always been in the same distressed condition—but to-night it irritated him.

He stopped and grasped one of the hanging boards. It resisted. He swore aloud and putting forth all his strength, tore away the board, and nearly fell on his back. Then he swore more loudly, and, feeling that here was a material foe with which he could grapple, he resolutely attacked the fence, and stripped off every board for three lengths; and, by much pushing, and tugging, and swearing, succeeded in shoving the two posts prostrate in the vacant lot. Then, perspiring and panting, he surveyed his work for a moment and, with a congratulatory “damn,” went on his way, feeling better.

By the time he reached the corner he was again deep in thought, and mechanically continued his habitual route toward the business district.

For ten minutes he walked briskly, with his eyes on the pavement, instinctively avoiding the increasing number of passers. Suddenly a man stopped in front of him, and said, “Hulloa, Morliss! Going to sleep on the road?”

He looked up and saw Sconer, Ralph’s father.

Morliss knew him but slightly, as a clerk usually knows one of the porters—by sight, and to the extent of “Good morning” or “How are you?”

“Hulloa, Sconer!” said he; “yes, I guess I was pretty near asleep. Thinking hard.”

"Had some bad luck?"

"Nothing unusual—lost my position that's all."

"You don't say. I thought Ralph was a good friend of yours?"

"So he is—good boy, too. He's up at the house now. But he couldn't help it. The firm were down on me."

Sconer had been looking for an opportunity to borrow money, and had stopped Morliss with this purpose in view.

"Well, well, old man, that's hard luck," said he. "Come in here, to Billy's, and we'll have some beer, and talk it over."

"Billy's" was a popular beer saloon, and though Morliss was not in the habit of spending much time in such places, the proposal met his mood to-night. It would brace him up and help drive out the blue devils. They took seats at a table in the back part of the room, and two glasses of beer were quickly emptied. Sconer ordered them refilled.

"What do you expect to do now, Morliss?" said he. "Anything in view?"

"No," said the other. "Hunt up some new slave-pen, I suppose. Ralph is going to find me something to-morrow."

"My boy Ralph is a great chap," said Sconer. "I'm proud of him. He's done pretty well in the last seven years, hasn't he? Do you know, Morliss, I believe the boy has got ten thousand dollars safely invested, besides his salary."

This reminded Morliss of something, and as the beer began to work, he grew careless in his talk.

"Yes," said he; "ten thousand dollars! and Ralph deserves it. He has worked hard for it for years—but look at the difference. Look at those skin-flints, Coldart and Goolie! What's ten thousand dollars to them? Why, there was an express package came to-day—just one payment—ten thousand dollars in crisp greenbacks."

"Pshaw!" said Sconer, "is that so? How did you know it?"

"Know it! I saw it—saw them count it, and saw Ralph put it in the vault."

"Well, I swear! That's lots of 'mon,' isn't it? Lucky crowd, I say."

"Lucky crowd! Yes, and a mean crowd! With ten thousand coming in every few days they cut off an old man's *five dollars a month*."

*They sat drinking beer until ten o'clock, and with the*

beer, Morliss became more talkative and more outspoken in his abuse of his former employers. Sconer, on the contrary, grew more silent and abstracted, paying but little attention to the other's complaints, and only answering by a "yes" or "no," "too bad," "dirty shame," and other sympathetic ejaculations.

At last Sconer roused himself, as if suddenly remembering something.

"By the way, Morliss," said he; "can you let me have a five for a few days?"

"Certainly," said Morliss. Then, as he put his hand in his pocket, he continued, "But, no—I forgot—I left all my money at home to-night, Sconer. Haven't but a quarter. Sorry, old man. Do you need it to-night?"

"Oh, no," said Sconer, carelessly; "it's no matter." To himself he added, "Liar! he's got it in his pocket, but never mind!"

Presently he rose, and with a stretch and a yawn, said, "Well, Morliss, I'm getting sleepy. Are you going home?"

"No," said the old man. "I came out to think, and I've done more talking than thinking so far. Guess I'll sit here awhile."

So Sconer left the room, and Morliss ordered another beer, and sat slowly sipping it.

The beer and his vigorous talk had kept him excited, and had intensified rather than quieted the gloomy resentment of his mood. His thoughts flowed on in the same channel, anger because of his, to him, unjust discharge, and rebellion against the bitter revilings of his wife.

If he thought of his daughter at all it was only to dismiss her quickly from his mind, as something foreign and unsuited to his present feelings.

At eleven o'clock he got up slowly and went out into the street. There were but few people in sight, and he stood for a moment looking irresolutely this way and that.

"No! I won't go home yet," he said; "Ralph will be there. They will all be up," and he turned and passed down the next street toward the river.

With head bent, as if wishing to avoid recognition, he paced slowly from block to block.

*As he approached the wholesale business district, the streets became deserted. The night murmur of the city died*

away behind him. His own echoing footsteps were the only sounds that broke the silence.

From far down the street came suddenly the sound of other steps approaching—now striking in regular cadence with his own—now shorter or longer, so that the echoes from the tall buildings were muffled and broken. He glanced up. A policeman on his beat. As they met under a gas lamp, the guardian of the peace looked at him narrowly and half paused after he had passed him—then resumed his slow, measured tread.

The row of lights that stretched out in perspective had grown less in number. He counted only four. He was opposite the establishment of Messrs. Coldart & Goolie. Glancing up at it, with a muttered curse, he kept on his way to the end of the street, and picked a path in the moonlight, among boxes and barrels and bales, to the end of the long wharf.

A schooner lay alongside the wharf, and a faint twinkle of light came from her cabin windows; but no one was stirring on board.

Sitting down on a box at the end of the pier, he looked out on the river. The moon, slightly waning, was high in the heavens, and the water was a sheet of glittering quicksilver that lapped sluggishly against the piles below him.

His walk and the frosty air had cleared away the fumes of the beer and cooled the fever of his anger, and the lonely beauty of the scene began to work its effect on his sensitive nature. Softer, pleasanter thoughts stole into his mind, and displaced the ugly demons of rebellion and hatred.

The world was not all unkind. Nature was always true and steadfast—changeless in beauty, however changing in moods.

What a fool he had been not to remember his only unfailing source of comfort! The only one? No! nor the best one. Was not his daughter always true and changeless? And she was not cold and passionless, like nature. She knew and felt his love and his sorrows. Poor little girl! She was waiting and worrying for him, while he had no thought for her. He got up briskly, and made his way back along the wharf, intent only on reaching home as soon as possible. A *clock on a neighboring building struck one.*

*On leaving the wharf he took the opposite side of the*

street from the one by which he had come, and walked close in the shadow of the buildings, so that the litter of straw and sawdust from the shipping doors deadened the sound of his steps. As he approached a blind alley, or court, between two buildings, a faint, unusual sound caused him to stop and listen. For a moment he stood still, then crept forward in the shadow, and peered round the corner of the building.

A dark figure was slowly and cautiously descending the fire-escape ladder into the alley, from the office of Coldart & Goolie.

With the swiftness of light he remembered the ten-thousand-dollar package. He looked quickly up the street. Only the long vista of street lamps! There was no one in sight. With nerves at their utmost tension, he drew back and waited.

His strained sense heard the cautious placing of each foot upon the round of the ladder—then, after a moment of silence, the soft thud as the man dropped to the straw beneath. Again silence, and he held his breath in the intensity of expectation.

Slowly, as if the man were carefully selecting each spot to tread on, the foot-steps approached. Then a figure leaned forward, and peered up the street.

In an instant, like a wildcat, Morliss was upon him, and together they struggled silently into the dim light of the street.

“Sconer!”

“Morliss!”

“You damned thief,” he hissed. “You have that money. Give it up, or—” his arm tightened on the other’s neck.

“Stop,” gasped Sconer. “Take your hand away. I’ve got the money—here in my coat pocket. Hold your jaw, and I’ll give you half.”

With an inarticulate growl of rage, Morliss renewed his grasp. He was by far the stronger man, and, in a few moments, still keeping that strangler’s grip on Sconer’s neck, he had wrested the package from the other’s pocket, and transferred it to his own. He partially loosened his hold, and Sconer broke suddenly from him and, muttering “Damn you! I’ll down you yet,” ran toward the river, darting quickly to the left along the dock frontage.

For a second Morliss hesitated—then, with some vague

dread of letting the man go without further talk, he turned and ran after him.

A loud voice behind him shouted: "Hi, there! Stop!" and he heard a shrill whistle, and the lumbering tread of a pursuer. Still he kept on.

Crack! and a bullet whizzed past his head. He stopped and turned.

"Hands up, quick!" shouted the policeman, who had also suddenly stopped, and covered Morliss with his still smoking revolver.

Up went Morliss' hands, and at the same moment another burly blue-coat came charging round the corner, and bore down upon them.

"Phat's that you caught, Jim?" puffed the new arrival.

"Dunno, yet, Tom. Go through him. See if he's a gun wid him."

They both approached Morliss cautiously, the revolver still covering him.

"Officers," said he, "you're wasting time. The man you want has gone down by the river. I was chasing him when you came up."

"Is that so, me bye?" said the man who was now searching Morliss. "Well, don't fret about the other man, now. Phat in the divil is this?" he continued, as he pulled out the package of money. "Is it granebacks, it is? Howly sufferin'. Jim, will you luck at that!—one thousand—two thousand! I'll be putting it in me pocket, Jim, till we rache the station."

"Be the powers, Tom, ye'll put it back where ye got it! It's the leftenant that'll take charge of that pot."

"Men," said Morliss, almost beside himself, "I just rescued that money from a burglar that stole it from Coldart & Goolie's office. I saw him coming down the fire-escape, as I was going home."

"Ye'll be wiser, old man, if ye kape yer tongue bechune yer tathe till ye're questioned by the parties in authority. Coldart & Goolie's, is it? Tom, ye'll take a look about the place, while I escort the gintleman to the station. Will ye come quietly, sir, or will ye have the bracelets?"

Half crushed and bewildered, Morliss answered:

"I'll come along. It'll be all right soon."

"*Divil a doubt of it, sir—and I see ye now. Ye're the chap that I passed on me beat two hours ago. Well, sir,*

ye'll kindly permit me to take yer arm, sir. Now, sir," and Morliss was led off toward the station.

During the first few moments of the walk, Morliss was silent, looking nervously to right and left, with the dread of being seen in such company. But the streets were deserted, and they met no one.

Then, as this first nervousness wore off, the absurdity, the grossness of the blunder, took possession of his mind.

"Officer," he said, somewhat hotly, "this is all tom-foolishness. Is a man to be taken to the station for saving his employer's money from a burglar?"

The big Irishman glanced down at him with a placid smile, and observed :

"Me friend, ye'll have an opporchunity to relate yer narrative prisenly. The leftenant is a gintlemanly aujence—and I hereby advise ye that it'll be me juty to repeat any remarks ye may make afther jue notice given as aforesaid."

This pompous statement caused a vague thrill of uneasiness to creep over Morliss. For the first time he began to feel alarmed. This policeman evidently did not credit his story. Perhaps the lieutenant would not. What then? Well, he could send for Ralph, and all would be right in a few moments. He had saved the money for the firm, and was entitled to a reward. Perhaps they would reinstate him in his position. But a thought came to him so suddenly that he stopped short, and his companion said, "None of that, me bye! Come along aisy, now."

He had forgotten that the real burglar was Ralph's father. Could he tell him that? Ralph would never believe it. What proof could he show? Great Heaven! What proof had he of anything? Slowly, like the approach of an ugly nightmare, there began to rise in his mind a dim conception of the appalling nature of the catastrophe that had overtaken him.

Arrested at one o'clock at night, with ten thousand dollars of stolen money in his pocket, in front of the building from which it had been stolen—his only defense, his own incredible and unsupported statement. The one man who knew him well enough to believe such a statement was Ralph Sconer, and it was Ralph's own father whom he was to accuse. One thought came to him strongly through all the bewildering perplexity of his position. He must not alienate Ralph. He

must not mention his father's name. The burglar must be a stranger, some one he had never seen before. So far, he thought he saw clearly.

But the dreadful hopelessness of it all began to bear upon him with crushing weight, and, when they at last reached the station, he was rather supported than led into the room, and stood before the officer, pale and trembling, with the cold perspiration dripping from his face—the very picture of a detected criminal.

The night officer in charge of the station looked keenly at the pair for a moment, and two or three sleepy policemen braced up their chairs and gave a languid attention to the proceedings.

"What have you there, Mulcahy?" said the lieutenant.

"I arristed him, sur, on Sugar Strate, just beyant the place of Coldart & Goolie. As I was proceeding around the corner of Spice Strate, on me regular bate, at ten minutes afther wan, I see a man a-runnin' for the river. 'Hould up!' says I; but he ran the faster. So I fired me gun in the air like, and it brought him to wid a round turn. Upon searching his person for concaled weapons, Misther Cassidy, who had come upon the sane, discovered a package of money, which I instructed him to replace in the prisoner's pocket. Here, sor, is the aforesaid package," and Mulcahy deftly extracted the aforesaid package from Morliss' pocket, and laid it on the desk.

The lieutenant had been watching Morliss during the narrative, and, at this point, he said, sharply:

"One of you fellows, there, get a chair. The man is faint."

Morliss dropped limply into the chair that was brought for him, and sat with his chin sunk on his breast. The officer swiftly examined the package, and mouthed an inaudible whistle. Then he turned to the policeman—"Go on, Mulcahy; why did you arrest the man?"

"He cud give no sathisfactory account of himself, sor, and, havin' run from an officer, and being found with a sum of money on his person, sor, I thought it proper to run him in, sor, for your examination."

"What had the man to say for himself?"

"He said, sor," and here Mulcahy smiled and winked

knowingly at his superior, "that he was chasing a burglar that had robbed Coldart & Goolie, and that he had *rescued* the money from him."

"Did he resist arrest?"

"No, sor; not to say so, sor. He came along aisy enough—with an occasional hitch."

"Did you ever see him before?"

"I seen him, sor, at eleven-fifteen this avening. As I came up me beat on Sugar Strate, he was going down toward the river. He had his coat up and his head down—which made me take note of him particular."

"Very good, Mulcahy. That will do."

"I should add, sor," said the policeman, "that I instructed Misther Cassidy to examine the premises of Coldart & Goolie," and the big Irishman saluted and withdrew to a chair.

"Now, my man," said the lieutenant to Morliss, "I'll have to ask you a few questions. Tell a straight story, and remember that what you now say goes on the record."

Morliss looked up in a dazed way and said, slowly, "There's no use in telling you my story. It won't be believed."

"Try it, and see, my man. You must answer my questions, or I shall have to keep you here."

"Ask your questions," said the other, wearily. "I'll answer them."

"Good! Now—what is your name?"

"John Morliss."

"Where do you live?"

"At No. 389 Norden Street."

"What were you doing on Sugar Street from eleven to one to-night?"

"I went from home, about eight o'clock. Walked down to Billy McGuire's saloon; drank some beer, and then walked down to the river to cool off."

"Where did you get this package of money?"

"As I came up from the river a man was climbing down the fire-escape from Coldart & Goolie's. I waited for him, caught him, and took away the money. The man escaped, and I was running after him, when the policeman came up."

"H'm! Did you know this man that was climbing down the fire-escape?"

For a fatal instant Morliss hesitated, then said, "No; he was a stranger. I never saw him before."

"Could you describe him? Would you know him if you saw him again?"

Once more Morliss hesitated. "I think not," said he. "It was dark, and we had only a short struggle together."

"Did he have this package of money in his hand?"

"N-o! It was in his pocket."

"How did you know he had the money?"

"I"—the old man faltered. Then he pulled himself together with an effort, and said, defiantly: "There is no use in my explanation. I told you it would not be believed. I knew he had the money because I saw the money put into the vault in the office this afternoon."

"What were you doing in Coldart & Goolie's office this afternoon?"

"I was a clerk in their employ until to-night."

"Ah! And to-night?"

"I was discharged"—Morliss' voice sank almost to a whisper, and his head dropped forward again. There was dead silence in the station.

In a few moments the lieutenant said, quietly: "Take a little time, my man. A straightforward story will be the best for you."

At this moment the door opened and Cassidy, the other policeman, entered and saluted.

"What report, Cassidy?"

"I have examined the premises of Coldart & Goolie, sur, and discovered that the window of the office adjacent to the fire-escape had been pried up wid a jimmy, and was left open. Dere was nothing amiss in de office, and de vault was locked."

"Did you see any one hanging about the neighborhood?"

"Nary soul, sur—on de strates or on de river front."

"That will do."

The lieutenant looked at his notes for a moment, then said: "Morliss, I notice your clothes and hands are dirty. Please explain how that happened."

Morliss looked vacantly at his hands, and then down at his clothes. His shoulder and one side of his coat and trousers were covered with dirt, as if he had rubbed against a dusty wall.

He half smiled at the recollection, then said: "I got mad at a fence on my way to town, and shoved a few lengths of it over."

A half-suppressed titter went round the room, instantly checked by a look from the officer.

"Will you step into the private office a moment?"

Mechanically Morliss rose and followed the lieutenant, who closed the door behind him.

"Take a chair, Mr. Morliss," said he, pleasantly, and as the prisoner dropped into the seat pointed out to him, the other drew up a chair close in front of him, and leaning forward, said, impressively:

"Mr. Morliss, I think I see through the whole of this unfortunate business. Now, you know, I have had lots of experience in cases of this kind, and I want to urge you to do the very best thing for yourself. Come now, save yourself from the worst, and own up that you took that money."

The old man sprang to his feet, his face purple with rage, and with clenched fist trembling in the air, he shouted:

"No, by God, sir! not to you nor to any man. I am innocent." He staggered and collapsed into the chair again.

The officer rose and walked back and forth several times, whistling softly. Then he sat down again.

"My man," said he, "it's foolish and worse than useless for you to persist in such a course. Now, don't get excited. Take it quietly. There is the strongest possible case against you. It's burglary—no more—no less. You know what that means. Now, look at the other side. The money has, fortunately, been recovered. The firm loses nothing. If you own up frankly, it may be—mind, I don't assure anything—but it may be that we can get the charge entered as something much less serious. Consider it well."

Morliss looked up for an instant, and said: "I didn't expect you to believe me. I can't help that."

"Then you've nothing more to say?"

"Nothing."

The lieutenant rose.

"I am sorry," said he. "You know, of course, what my duty is. Would you like to send word to your family, or any friends?"

*With a shiver and a choking sound in his voice, Morliss answered, "No."*

The lieutenant opened the door, and called one of the policemen.

"In No 11," said he, and, as Morliss stood up, he continued, significantly: "I shall be on duty until seven, Mr. Morliss. Should you wish to add anything to your statement, you can call one of the officers."

With a shake of the head, Morliss silently followed his conductor along the corridor and into the narrow cell.

He sat down on the edge of the bunk, and the grated door was closed and bolted.

Messrs. Coldart and Goolie slept in serene unconsciousness of their loss and its recovery. Ralph Sconer, after some hours of idle love-melancholy, had yielded to healthy nature, and was dreaming rosy dreams of the future.

Ralph Sconer's father had crept up the stairs with his shoes in his hand, and had slunk into his room and his bed, unheard by Ralph.

Disappointment, anger, and fear combined, had not sufficed to keep his hardened nature awake more than an hour. He also slept.

John Morliss and John Morliss' daughter watched for the morning.

## CHAPTER III

### THE NET TIGHTENS

The establishment of Coldart & Goolie was open for business every day in the year—Sundays and three holidays excepted—at seven o'clock in the morning, and the clerks and porters, and other employés, were almost invariably on duty at the stroke of the hour. We say almost, for a few cases of tardiness had been known. No individual clerk had ever been late more than twice, however, for the simple reason that upon the second offense he ceased to be a clerk in that establishment.

On any morning of the year, with the exceptions noted, the person who had the misfortune to be passing at the early hour of six forty-five a. m. could have the satisfaction of feeling that he was not alone, for the sidewalk in front of Coldart & Goolie's was occupied by a dozen or more of men and boys, who talked and laughed, hustled and chased one another, and crowded all the life possible into the few moments that elapsed before the arrival of Ralph Sconer with the keys of the office. The latter event took place with never-failing regularity at five minutes before seven.

On the morning following our notable St. Valentine's day, the usual congregation of clerks was startled from its sidewalk festivities by an extraordinary apparition. The trim, graceful figure of a young lady in that part of the town at such an early hour was so absolutely unprecedented that the most ebullient horse-play was paralyzed in mid-career, and boys and men stopped and looked with all their eyes and all their mouths, and with their entire anatomies in the position of strained attention. One man alone felt an added sensation of dread. Mr. Sconer, Senior, had come to work as usual, determined with his characteristic bravado to face any possible accuser, and give the lie direct to all accusations.

*This gentleman recognized the daughter of John Morliss,*

and stared at her with a brazen look, which was the cloak of a quaking heart.

She came swiftly up to the group, paused for a moment, as she scanned the attentive faces, and said :

“Can any one of you gentlemen tell me where to find Mr. Ralph Sconer?”

There was an instantaneous movement throughout the audience, and a chorus of answers, from which she finally gleaned the statement of the clerk who stood nearest her, that Mr. Sconer would arrive in less than five minutes.

She stood for a moment, looking nervously up and down the street, and over the heads of her wondering audience.

“He usually comes down on the Spring Street car, doesn’t he?”

“Yes, always,” was the response from several voices in unison.

She bowed slightly, said “Thank you, I think I will go and meet him,” and sailed quickly up the street.

Then the boys began to ask questions all together, and to volunteer answers in the same breath.

“Who is she?” “What’s the matter with Ralph?” “Did you see how pale she looked?” “I tell you she’s Ralph’s sister.” “Isn’t she a stunner, though?” “Rats! I know Ralph isn’t married.” “Bet you five to one Ralph don’t show up this morning.”

Mr. Sconer, Senior, put his hands in his pockets, and slouched away from the group, and paused at the alley, and glanced up at the fire-escape ladder, and felt an increasing sense of discomfort.

As Louise turned the corner she ran into the arms of Ralph, who was coming rapidly from the opposite direction.

“I beg your pardon,” said Ralph. “Why, Louise; what in the world has happened?”

“Oh, Ralph! Father—do you know anything of father? He has not come home.”

“Not come home?” echoed Ralph, in astonishment.

“No; and I sat up all night for him, and”—the tears were coming, but she choked them back, resolutely.

Instantly Ralph’s solicitude was transferred from the father to the daughter.

“Why, you poor little girl!” said he. “You must be all worn out. Come, let us go to the office, and sit down for a

moment." And he continued, as he took her arm, "Don't be frightened; we will find him, dear."

The last word slipped out inadvertently, but it sounded so natural and pleasant that it was only greeted by a sudden lifting of the dark lashes and a little half-smile on the tired face.

But as they walked together to the office, and he talked reassuringly to the girl at his side, Ralph repeated the word to himself many times, and with many tender inflections. He had dared to say it aloud, and it had not been rebuked. What mattered the loss of a dozen fathers?

He nodded pleasantly to the waiting clerks, who followed the couple up the stairs with many nudges and covert winks and grimaces.

Each clerk went quietly to his post, and the murmur of the day's work began.

As Ralph placed a chair for Louise, a slow, heavy step sounded on the stairs. The door opened and a big, blue-coated policeman entered. He looked leisurely about the office, let his eyes rest for a moment with frank admiration upon Louise, then turned to Ralph.

"Mornin', sor."

"Good morning," said Ralph. "What can I do for you?"

"Be you Mr. Coldart, or Mr. Goolie?"

"Neither," answered Ralph. "I am Mr. Sconer, in charge of the office. I think I can respond for the firm in any business you may have."

The Irishman examined him critically for a moment.

"I tink youse'll do," said he. "Can I spake wid youse alone for a minute?"

"Certainly," said Ralph. "Step into the private office. Louise, please excuse me a moment."

With a profound obeisance to the young lady, the policeman stepped into the office, followed by Ralph.

"Mr. —"

"Sconer," said Ralph.

"Ah, yes—Mr. Scouner—have youse looked in yer vault this mornin'?"

"No!" said Ralph, quickly. "Why?"

"Look in yer vault, and report me de result of yer investigations," and the big officer settled himself in Mr. Coldart's easy chair and looked placidly at the ceiling.

With a sudden sinking at the heart Ralph rushed to the vault, opened it, glanced into a drawer, and turned quickly away with a pale face and a muttered ejaculation.

Again he looked into the vault, pulled out every drawer, examined every shelf, and hurried out. As he passed Louise he caught the intent, frightened look in her eyes. He only nodded abstractedly, and passed into the private office.

"We have been robbed," he whispered.

"Jist so," said the officer, calmly. "How much?"

"A package of ten thousand dollars in greenbacks has been taken from the vault. The vault door was locked," continued Ralph, hurriedly. "No one has the combination except the firm, and myself, and one clerk."

"What might be the name of that clerk?" asked the policeman.

"Morliss," said Ralph, with a sudden start and a steady gaze at the officer.

"Jist right," said the latter. " 'Tis the very name he gave us."

"What!" said Ralph, starting forward; "you don't mean to tell me—"

"Aisy now, aisy! I mean to tell ye this, Mr.—a—Scounder. We've got yer ten thousand dollars at the station, and we've got the man what lifted it, and he says his name is Morliss."

Ralph staggered to a chair and sat down. "John Morliss," said he, slowly. "Impossible!"

He sat looking at the policeman without seeing him. He remembered Morliss' anger—his last words on leaving the house—he must have money some way. But no, it was too utterly absurd. It was not to be thought of. Morliss was incapable of such an act.

"Officer," said he, more quietly. "I am most heartily glad that the money is recovered; but there is some mistake about the man. John Morliss is innocent. I'd swear to it."

"He was arristed at wan o'clock in front of this office, wid de stuff in his pocket," said the policeman, conclusively.

Ralph was silenced for an instant. "Never mind," said he; "there is some mistake. Which station is it?"

"At the Spring Street station."

"Who is the officer in charge there?"

"Cap'n Jones is on to-day. Leftenant Muley was in charge last night."

"I know Captain Jones very well," said Ralph. "I will come over to the station in a few moments. Thank you, very much, officer."

"Don't mention it, sor," and the policeman rose, and with "Good morning" and another low bow to Louise in passing, went down the stairs.

Ralph stood at the door of the private office for an instant, looking at the clerks, then he beckoned to one of the older ones.

"Mr. Strong," said he, as the clerk entered the private office, "you will please take charge here for an hour or so. When Mr. Coldart or Mr. Goolie arrives say to them that the vault was robbed last night by"—he hesitated—"some unknown parties, but the money was all recovered by the police, and is now at the Spring Street station. I am going over there to secure it. That is all. You understand that it is unnecessary to mention the matter to any one else."

The clerk bowed and returned to his place.

"Now, Miss Morliss," said Ralph, "I think we can go."

Louise was watching his face with her eyes full of a strange terror, but Ralph avoided her glance.

As the door closed she grasped his arm. "Ralph, tell me quick, what is it? You have heard something about father?"

"Yes, Louise," said he, with an apparent effort at cheerfulness. "Your father is all safe and sound. The police made one of their usual blunders last night, and arrested him instead of the right man. He is up at the Spring Street station."

"Oh," said the girl, with a great sigh of relief. "He's all well and safe, then," and there was a ring of happiness in her voice that made Ralph shiver. "Poor old dada, to be locked up all night in a station. Hurry, hurry, Ralph; we must get him out," and as they passed out of the street door she seized his arm and dragged him along almost at a run.

"No, no," she panted, as Ralph paused at the corner. "Don't wait for a car. We must get there quick. Think of poor old father sitting in that place waiting for us."

Ralph thought, "I wonder why he didn't send for me at once," and he continued to ponder on that question without speaking.

"Ralph," said Louise, as they hurried along, "how did they come to make such a mistake? What was he arrested for?"

"Well, Louise, it's a queer mixed up matter, and I can't get it straightened out yet. You see, there was a burglary in our office last night, and—your father seems to have been near there—and they arrested him on suspicion."

Louise stopped and threw her head back. "My father! Burglary! Ralph, what fools those policemen are! Come, don't wait, please. Let's hurry!" and she darted forward again.

Once more she paused and said: "The money, Ralph, did he say they had found that?"

"Yes," said Ralph, nervously. "The policeman said they had recovered it."

Quick as a flash came the question: "Then, where did they find it? Tell me that?"

"We don't really know anything," said poor Ralph, "until we get to the station."

"What did that policeman say?" and now the eyes were flashing.

"He said—" and Ralph hesitated and tried to look away, but the eyes held him fast.

"Well, what?" this time imperiously.

"The man said, dear," (that was a blunder, Ralph; the word brought only a quick, impatient frown)—"he said that they found the money in your father's pocket."

The girl gave a sudden gasp of pain. "It's a lie, a wicked lie! Oh! There is some horrid plot in all this. Come, hurry, please!" and now with flushed cheeks she walked swiftly forward without another word.

As they neared the station Ralph said: "Try and be patient, Louise. It will do no good to get frightened or angry. A little quiet investigation will explain it all."

She shook her head, and her lip curled contemptuously, but she answered nothing.

Captain Jones rose to meet them as they entered, and glanced at the young girl as he said: "Good morning, Mr. Sconer; I am very glad to have such good news for you, sir. Your money is safe."

"We are all very grateful to your brave officers for that part of it, Captain; but you have surely arrested the wrong man."

The captain smiled. "You will hardly think so, Mr. Sconer, when you have seen the report of Lieutenant Muley's examination. There never was a clearer case, sir." Ralph frowned impatiently, then, wishing to cut short this conversation before Louise, he said :

"Captain Jones, let me introduce Miss—" he turned, but the young lady had slipped away, and stood at the far end of the room, with her back toward them.

"His daughter," said Ralph, in a low tone. The officer raised his eyebrows, and nodded his head in a sympathetic manner.

Ralph continued in a louder voice, "I presume, sir, we may see the—Mr. Morliss."

"Certainly," said the captain, and he called to one of the policemen : "Admit Mr. Sconer and the lady to No. 11."

Ralph approached Louise, and touched her on the shoulder, but she turned from him impatiently, and, with face averted, followed the policeman down the corridor. Ralph lagged slowly behind, and halted when they stopped before the door.

He heard the quick, convulsive cry, "Father!" and the old man's broken voice, "My little girl!" and he turned about, with his face to the wall, and put his hands in his pockets.

"Do you wish to go in, sir?" called the policeman.

"Not at present," said Ralph, and he strode out into the office.

He looked through the report of the night officer's examination of Morliss with a mind, as he felt, rather than thought, strongly prejudiced in favor of the prisoner. His intimate acquaintance and association with the father of Louise made him feel, to a certain degree, that such a crime was incompatible with the nature of his old friend.

But Ralph was emphatically a business man. He owed his rapid and unaided rise to his own keen perception of the necessity of system, the logical in practice, the government of himself and of others by broad, general rules. The exceptional, the anomalous in nature had no place in his schedule. It was to him almost the equivalent of the impossible.

So as he followed the clear lines of the report, the statements of the policeman, the wildly improbable and evidently *ill-prepared story of Morliss*, and, as he supplemented the report by his own knowledge of the careless, irresponsible

character of the man, and his angry longing for money, Ralph's habitual lines of thought slowly converged, in spite of his feeling, to the conviction that Morliss was guilty. But, side by side with that conviction there grew also the resolution to do all that was possible to save him—for the sake of his daughter.

He looked up from the papers, and turned to meet the sarcastic smile of Captain Jones.

"Is it a strong case, Mr. Sconer?" said that official.

"On the face of it, yes," said Ralph. "Nevertheless, the man is innocent."

The captain shrugged his shoulders and answered, coldly: "Perhaps so; it will take twelve men to decide that point."

The policeman in the corridor announced that No. 11 wished to see Mr. Sconer.

As Ralph entered the cell, Morliss and his daughter both rose to meet him, and, contrary to his expectation, they both seemed cheerful.

"Ralph, my boy," said the old man, as he grasped his hand, "I blundered on some hard luck again—getting myself locked up and worrying my little girl; but I saved your ten thousand. I was feeling pretty blue here, until this sunshine found me," and he looked at his daughter. "But I knew you would stand by me, Ralph. Now, what must we do?" he continued, nervously. "I suppose some formalities are necessary before I can walk out again?"

"Tell Ralph all the story, father," said Louise. "He nearly vexed me by his manner as we came here. But I'll forgive you, Ralph, because you'll soon feel sorry to think how stupid you were."

"Yes, Mr. Morliss," said Ralph; "tell me all about it."

They sat down on the bunk, and, with his daughter's hand in his, Morliss retold his story. But the remembrance of Ralph's father and fear of alluding to him, embarrassed the old man. He hesitated, and grew more and more nervous to the end.

Louise was neither nervous nor embarrassed.

"There! Mr. Ralph Sconer!" said she. "Don't you think it a pretty thing to lock my father up because he risked his life in attacking a fierce burglar, and beat the burglar and recovered your money?" and she was the picture of triumphant indignation.

Ralph got up and walked to the end of the cell.

"Mr. Morliss," said he, "did you ever tell any one the combination of the vault?"

"Never—to anyone," said Morliss, and then he looked hard at Ralph for a moment, as a new thought came to him. "Did you ever tell anyone, Ralph?"

"No one—except you and the firm."

"Did you ever have the combination written down anywhere?"

"Why, yes—for a few days after it was set, I had the numbers on a card in my pocket-book. No one could have seen them."

"No," said Morliss, thoughtfully, and added: "He must have been one of those expert safe burglars, that can work a combination by the sound."

To Ralph's mind, with its conviction of the old man's guilt, this was an unnecessary and unbecoming suggestion. He felt angry for a moment, and could not forbear saying: "How did you know, Mr. Morliss, that the door had been opened by the combination?"

The prisoner flushed slightly, and stammered: "Why, didn't you say so?"

"Did I?" said Ralph, absently. "Yes, perhaps I did."

Louise had been looking at Ralph curiously, and the light had slowly faded out of her face. Now she said: "I don't think it's necessary to discuss the matter, Ralph. Please tell us what we must do to get father away from here."

It was Ralph's turn to hesitate. He cleared his throat and said: "Well, Louise, as your father suggested, there are some formalities required. We shall have to go before a justice—some time this morning, probably—but I think we can get Mr. Morliss free, at least for the present. Until then, I must go back to the office. If you would like to come with me, Louise, we can talk over what is best to be done."

"Thank you, no," said the young lady. "I prefer to wait here with father."

As Ralph turned to go, Morliss rose and held out his hand. "Ralph," said he, "You believe in me, don't you? You will not desert me? There is no one else to help me, Ralph."

And Ralph avoided his old friend's eye, but grasped his hand as he answered: "Mr. Morliss, you may rest assured

that I will do all that any man can do for you. And now"—he tried to smile—"cheer up, both. I will come back soon, and we will get over the little unpleasant formality."

"Ralph," said Louise, "would it trouble you to send a line to mother? Just tell her, please, that I am with father, and we will be home soon."

There was a cool politeness in the tone and a searching, indignant, not pleading, look in the dark eyes, and Ralph understood their meaning. He would have given much not to have deserved that tone or that look, but he could no more help his convictions than the girl could help her faith. He bowed silently and left the cell.

"Captain Jones," he said to the officer, "I suppose Mr. Morliss must go before a justice?"

"Yes, Mr. Sconer; at ten o'clock."

"You—you think it will go to the Grand Jury?"

"Unquestionably—"

"I will be back before ten. Captain, would you mind doing me a favor?" (he handed the officer a bill.) "Please send one of the men out to get the best breakfast he can find, and send it in—for two—Miss Morliss will wait with her father."

"Certainly, Mr. Sconer."

"Well, good morning, Captain. I will see you again soon," and Ralph turned to go.

"Oh, by the way, Mr. Sconer," said the official. "This little package. Don't you want it?"

"I beg your pardon," said Ralph, quickly. "Yes, by all means. Thanks," and he returned for the ten thousand dollars.

At half past eight Ralph was at his desk, and the money was restored to the vault. He sent a brief note by messenger to Mrs. Morliss, and then tried to give his attention to the business of the day; but even his stern self-control was insufficient to keep his thoughts from the Spring Street station, and the strange shadow which a single night had cast over the future.

When Mr. Coldart arrived, at nine o'clock, Ralph related the whole affair to him as concisely as possible, and added that he would like to be excused to attend the examination before the justice.

"You will do as you see fit, Mr. Sconer," said Mr. Coldart. "Of course, it is necessary for you to testify to certain facts. I trust you have no weak sympathy for the man."

"I have sympathy for him, sir," said Ralph. "He has been my friend, and I have believed in him. I cannot help feeling deeply to see him in such a situation."

"As you please, Mr. Sconer. As you please, sir. You doubtless have some special grounds for your sentiments. My knowledge of the man is confined to two facts: He was a careless, worthless clerk, and he is a detected burglar. I trust you will not forget, sir, that our duty to ourselves and to society demands that we assist the law in treating such men with its utmost rigor."

"I shall not forget my duty, sir," said Ralph, as he bowed and left the office.

The examination before the justice occupied less than half an hour. There was no evidence in favor of the prisoner, except his own incredible statement, and Ralph's brave and earnest defense of his previous character.

"I am very sorry, Mr. Sconer," said the justice. "The question is not what the man did not do on other occasions but what he did do in this special case. The prisoner is held to the Grand Jury, and the bail is fixed at three thousand dollars."

"Your honor will accept me as security?" said Ralph, eagerly.

"Certainly, Mr. Sconer. The clerk will make out the papers."

Louise had sat through the examination with flushed cheeks and bright eyes. Morliss seemed worn out and half stupid. When Ralph held out his hand and said, "Now you are free to go home, Mr. Morliss," he started and answered, as he took the other's hand: "Thank you, Ralph. I knew it would be right as soon as I saw you. I'm glad it's all over."

And Louise said, "Yes, we thank you very much, Ralph. You have been very kind to us. I suppose if it were not for you, father would have to stay locked up in a cell. Come, father, dear; Ralph says we may go home now."

There was nothing unkind in the words, but somehow they *hurt; and, as Ralph walked out behind the father and daughter, his heart was very heavy.*

On the street Morliss turned and held out his hand again: "You will come up soon, Ralph?"

"Oh, yes; very soon," said Ralph, and he looked at Louise, but Louise walked on without a word or a glance.

So Ralph went back to his office, feeling hurt and sore. He had worked hard to save a man whom he believed to be guilty. He had become the man's surety for three thousand dollars and, knowing the man as he thought he did, he half feared that the bond would be forfeited. All this he had done for the sake of Louise, and she had rewarded him by a few commonplace words of thanks, without a single kindly look. The peculiarities of woman in general, and of this woman in particular, were not included in Mr. Ralph Sconer's business schedule. It was not perfect as a schedule of life rules. There were many moves in the game of which he was totally ignorant.

But with the straightforward determination of his character, Ralph never faltered in the course he had laid out for himself. In spite of rebuffs or unkind looks, he would do the best that he knew to save John Morliss from the danger that threatened him. And whether or not he succeeded in this, he felt, with the iron confidence of a business man in his own opinions, that some time Louise would see that he was right, and would reward his self-sacrificing devotion.

Morliss and his daughter walked quickly home, and though the girl's heart was heavy with a strange new dread of the future, yet she so devoted herself to cheering and encouraging her father that the old man's elastic spirits rose clear above the clouds that had closed about him, and Louise herself caught some of the hope and cheerfulness that she had awakened.

By the time they reached the house, the danger, if remembered at all, seemed so vague and far away, that it scarcely dimmed their horizon. Both were so worn out by weary watching and fierce anxiety that they yielded without resistance to the sweet influence of the present respite, and kindly nature dulled the sensitiveness of over-strained nerves.

Mrs. Morliss met them with an unexpected mildness, though even one of her worst moods would have seemed trifling to these two who had weathered such a night and morning. *She had been thoroughly frightened by their long absence, and still more alarmed by the short, vague message*

of Ralph. She had been alone for hours, and her relief and pleasure at the return of her truant family made her forget to scold for the time.

But in the following days she extracted from Louise, bit by bit, all the facts of the case, and her sullen spirit brooded over them. She never doubted the guilt of her husband. Such a crime was quite in keeping with her distorted image of the character of Morliss.

But she did not revile him. Her indignation was too deep for ordinary expressions. She ignored him almost totally, and only by long-drawn sighs and muttered self-commisera-tions did she indicate her consciousness of his presence.

And Morliss spent nearly all his time in the little attic that he used as a studio. With his beloved canvas before him he forgot the existence of employers, and officers, and wives. Only the light step and cheery voice of his daughter reminded him of his connection with the world's affairs.

Ralph came and went, and came again, and Louise and he talked of the approaching crisis in her father's fate. But Louise was always the same—courteous, pleasant, coldly grateful—never free and friendly, as she had been before that fatal morning.

And poor Ralph suffered, and was meek and subservient in his manner, and still thought of the best he could do for her, still hugged his delusion that she would one day understand and appreciate it all.

The Grand Jury met, and John Morliss was indicted for burglary.

## CHAPTER IV

### A GENTLEMAN OF LEISURE

The café of the Compos Club, on the evening of Sunday, March 28th, entertained only four club members, but they were choice spirits. They were of the faithful few that stick manfully to the post of duty, and only absence from the city or severe illness was accepted as an excuse for failure to be present every evening at the little round table, on which stood a bottle of seltzer and sundry small flasks and glasses.

There was not much conversation in the group this evening. There was rarely much conversation. It was rarely that anyone had anything in particular to say, and it was still more rarely that anyone cared to listen to anything that anyone had to say. And if one dared to attempt a lengthy statement he was commonly suppressed by yawns of weariness and languid but pithy interruptions, which were a pretty sure disinfectant of the enthusiasm microbes that he might have acquired.

Yet these four fellows liked each other pretty well. They enjoyed sitting together and snubbing each other, dragging out each other's weak points, so that the one might suffer for the amusement of the many.

Under cover of a thick veil of cigarette smoke one of the party hazarded the harmless remark:

“Jack must have gone to church.”

To which another replied with an effort:

“You go to church occasionally, don't you, Jim?”

“Yes, occasionally.”

“You travel about from church to church, distribute your pious proclivities, as it were?”

“As it were.”

“Please don't answer like a parrot or a phonograph. Did you ever in all your wanderings among the churches encounter Jack Stelwyn in any church?”

“Never. Continue the examination.”

"Did you ever see any one who had ever seen any one who had ever seen Jack Stelwyn in a church?"

"Never. Next?"

"Will you kindly inform the company then, why you are such an ass as to suggest or suppose that Jack Stelwyn has gone to church to-night?"

Upon which a third party remarked:

"Socrates, you weary us with your queries and your quibbles. The glasses are empty. Order them refilled."

"And make the glasses five, O Socrates," called a new voice, and Jack Stelwyn approached the group.

He was a good looking fellow, Mr. John Stelwyn, of thirty or thereabouts, with a clear blue eye and a quick elastic movement that was a contrast to the affected weariness of the four.

"Jack, you have been accused of going to church this evening."

"The defendant pleads guilty," answered Jack as he threw off his coat.

The four lounging figures actually sat up, with varying expressions of astonishment and incredulity on their faces.

"O Socrates," said the one who had last spoken, "will you now order those drinks? It is a clear case of providential retribution."

"Gentlemen, I am at your mercy," answered the other, as he touched the bell, "but Stelwyn, if the story be not too long and the causes not too complex for our over-worked brains, you may be permitted to state what induced you to stray so far from your wonted paths."

"Boys," said Stelwyn, as he glanced at the other three: "Has he been in this condition very long? Don't drink any more, Joe. When you approach the conversational stage you are insupportable."

"You are right, Jack, I forgot myself. Gentlemen, accept my apologies and excuses for having nearly been the cause of one of Jack's stories."

"Nevertheless, gentlemen," said Mr. Stelwyn, "I have something to tell you, painful for you to hear."

"Anything is, Jack."

"I am obliged to leave you for a few days."

"Does he call that painful to hear?"

"*You make us almost happy, Jack!*"

"*If you leave us some blank order-cards with your signa-*

ture, Stelwyn, we will try and bear or drown our sorrow for your absence, while the cards hold out."

"Fellow-citizens," said Jack, "I am about to accept a sacred trust imposed upon me."

"Hear! hear!"

"—by the law of this free and glorious commonwealth."

"Great Heaven! The man's going to run for alderman."

"We'll down you, Jack."

"The Club's agin it, me bye."

"Ye're not of the proper ancisthry, Misther Stilwyn. You're only an American."

"In short, boys," said Jack, "I have a summons to the jury, and I turn up at Judge Servem's Court to-morrow at ten o'clock."

This announcement was greeted by groans.

"Gentlemen," said one, "You will pardon me for remarking that the drinks are on Mr. Stelwyn. With your permission, Mr. Stelwyn, I will ring the bell. One of the house rules, you know."

"Can't you get excused, Jack?"

"Not without too much lying. I got off last year, and I'd rather like to try the thing for once."

"What a callow youth it is!"

"Did it want to get out and try its wings in the great world?"

"Have any of you fellows ever served on a jury?" inquired Jack.

"Mr. Stelwyn, I ask you candidly, does any man here look like a juryman?"

"I should be sorry to see any man here on a jury in a case of mine," said Jack. "I know he'd flip up a coin for his verdict."

"Which is just about what you'll do. Do you expect us to think that you're going to listen to evidence and that you've got brains enough to understand it?"

"No, James," said Stelwyn, "I don't expect you to think anything."

"Well, Jack, you may tell us a little about it. What is it? Are they criminal or—what d'ye call 'em—civil cases?"

"Criminal Court."

"Got a lot of murderers and thieves and burglars to hang and lock up, have you? Now, Jack, don't you weaken on

'em. Show your breeding and give 'em the—the extreme penalty of the law. Isn't that the proper phrase?"

"Somebody buy that man a drink," said another. "He's getting dry again."

"Do you know any of the parties, Jack?"

"What parties?"

"Why, these murderers and so forth?"

"Oh, yes," said Stelwyn. "I've been around to the County Jail and got introduced to all of them. After I've decided to hang them, I'm going to give a swell farewell dinner here at the Club and have them all come. You're to be toastmaster, Jim."

"All right! 'In the prison cell I sit.' How's that for a sentiment?"

"Neck or nothing."

"The last drop."

"Roped in and roped out."

"The Danse du Col."

"Swing, swing together."

"Our friend the hangman."

"Our host the juryman."

"Murder as a fine art by John De Quincy Stelwyn."

"But seriously, Jack, are there any long cases or murder trials? Do you expect to be locked up for many nights in succession?"

"No," answered Stelwyn. "I believe there's nothing very important coming up. The only case I know of is a burglary. An old chap called Mossback or Moss something, that was caught in the act of robbing a safe."

"Hold on!" said another, lazily. "I remember something like that. Think it was old Coldart that told me. The burglar was a clerk or employe of Coldart's, wasn't he?"

"By Jove!" said a third. "If he was smart enough to rob Coldart he ought to be canonized. Don't you send him up, Jack. Coldart euchred me out of five thousand on a deal I had with him. Might as well have put his hand in my pocket while I was asleep."

"That's just what he did, Jim. You probably were asleep. Your normal condition you know."

"If you care to listen, I'll tell you fellows how it happened."

"But you see we don't care to listen, Jim."

"Don't let him begin."

"Shut him off."

"Buy him another drink."

In the midst of these clamors Mr. Jack Stelwyn rose and sought his overcoat and hat.

"Gentlemen," said he, "my duties of the morrow require a clear head."

"Take mine, Jack."

"Don't forget to have a little flask, boy."

"Send 'em all up, Jack."

"— and so," continued Stelwyn. "I must withdraw from the danger of contagion. Good night, boys," and he strode from the room, followed by a series of rhythmic groans.

Mr. Stelwyn was one of the eligible young bachelors, so very eligible that he was accounted confirmed as a bachelor. His father, a Virginian of Union sentiments, had disposed of his interests in his native state before the war and had moved with his wife and son to settle in Compos, an atmosphere more congenial politically if not climatically.

Jack had graduated at Harvard with the anomalous record of honors both scholastic and athletic, and after a year abroad had entered the law school, when the sudden death of his father and the inheritance of a fortune of thirty thousand a year decided him to abandon his incipient profession and devote himself to the preservation and enjoyment of his property. In his case preservation and enjoyment were not incompatible. He was neither ostentatiously extravagant nor noticeably economical. He gave himself all that he wanted, and because his wants had never been excessive his income had proved more than sufficient to meet them.

But had circumstances combined to arouse a vigorous desire, he was the man to sacrifice his entire fortune if necessary to its satisfaction.

Up to this time his comfort had been undisturbed by violent desires of any kind. He enjoyed himself mildly with books and music and pictures. He gave a few hours a week to his real estate agent, his lawyer, his broker, and to his private accounts, and a few months a year to fishing, shooting, and travel.

Since the death of his mother, which took place less than two years after his father's, he had torn down the old home-

stead and erected a modern apartment building in its place. Nearly all of the first story had been arranged and fitted up as a commodious suite of bachelor apartments, with a private entrance from the side street, and in these apartments Mr. John Stelwyn was at home.

A special breakfast was prepared for him from the restaurant in the building and was served in his own rooms, and a large proportion of the rent paid by the proprietor of the restaurant was off-set by his charge for the breakfast of the proprietor of the building.

For luncheon and dinner Jack was a free lance, and commonly found his quarry at his club.

Socially he was popular and was more sought than seeking. Morally, his self-respect and his cultivated, though indolent, tastes, restrained him from degrading excesses. Ambition he had not, or knew not that he had it. Love he believed in theoretically from his instincts and his reading, but doubted its possible perfection in life. His own experiences, however numerous, had left no scar. He was far from cynical. He was not even blasé, but no interest had yet been strong enough to shake his well-poised nature. He thought himself a cool, determined, indifferent man of the world. Cool and determined he undoubtedly was, but not indifferent. His eight years of responsible experience had brought him in contact with the surface of many things, and had induced a surface crust upon himself. He naturally mistook this exterior growth, with which he was well acquainted, for his character, of which he knew but little.

Mr. Stelwyn reached his apartments at half past eleven and the door was opened by his servant, Colon, a negro about fifty years old, who had emigrated from Virginia as a free-man with his former master, Jack's father.

Colon had been the devoted adherent of the family both in slavery and in freedom, and his wife and eight children, all acquired since his arrival in Compos, had not shaken his earlier loyalty to the Stelwyn family and to its sole surviving representative.

The old negro invariably waited the arrival of his master before retiring to his own family. Whether late or early, and it was usually late, Jack never had to use his latch-key. *Colon would have felt unspeakably humiliated if he had ever failed to welcome the young master and see that all his com-*

forts were provided and his orders given for the following day.

"Ah have to wait foh Mas'r Jack," he said to his wife. "Cose some time he might come home too juberlant and might requiah mah assistance."

But Jack had a pretty hard head, and it was not often that the old man had even the slightest reason to think his services necessary. Nothing would have pleased him more than to undress his master and put him to bed.

"Well, old King Cole," said Stelwyn, as the servant took his coat and hat. "Did you order my breakfast for eight-thirty?"

"Yaas, Mas'r Jack, a broiled young chicken, and —"

"Never mind the menu," said Stelwyn as he stood before the wood fire in the library. "Your selection is always good, daddy. The desideratum to-morrow morning is promptness. You know I have to be at Court before ten o'clock."

"Yoe leave yoe ole uncle to ten' to all de 'siderattums, Mas'r Jack. Ah'll have yoe breakfast on time and ah'll wake yoe at seven-thirty. 'Pears to me like yoe ought to go to bed now, Mas'r Jack."

"'Pears to me like you want to go home to the bosom of your family, you old swindler. Get along with you—skip."

"Nuffin moe yoe want to-night, Mas'r Jack?"

"Yes, I want to get rid of an old black thing that's hanging around here. Do you know the way home, Cole?"

"Ah'se goin', Mas'r Jack. Ah'se goin'. Good-night, Mas'r Jack."

"Good-night, old Backsheesh —"

The old servant had reached the door when Stelwyn called:

"Cole."

"Yaas, Mas'r Jack."

"Come back here. How's the kid?"

"Well, Mas'r Jack," and the negro chuckled. "Yoe just ought to see that two-yer-old. He's up, and a projeckin' round de house, openin' all de draws an' pullin' out de ingrejents, so de missus can't keep no count on 'em. An' he's hollerin' for Mas'r Jack. Lawd bless yoe, he ain't sick no moe."

"Why don't you get him something to amuse him, you old vagabond? The missus 'll drive you out of the house pretty

soon and I'll have to see your old ugly phiz here all the time. Take this two dollars. Go buy the kid a Noah's ark or some blocks or something. Tell him I'll come and take him to ride when I get done with this blasted jury."

"Thank yoe, Mas'r Jack. Huh! Won't dat boy's eyes bulge out when he sees de Noe's ahk! Ah'll tell him, Mas'r Jack. Ah'll tell him. Good-night."

"Good-night, daddy."

Left to himself, Mr. Stelwyn pulled an easy chair in front of the glowing fireplace, put on his slippers and dressing-gown, lit a cigarette, and looked about for a few moments at the crowded book-shelves that occupied all the available wall space of the room.

Presently he selected a volume of "The Earthly Paradise" and sat down to read.

"The best book for a nightcap," he often said. "Not by any means that it makes one drowsy, but because it thoroughly shuts out the present and paves the way for pleasant dreams."

And so he sat and read for an hour. Gradually his mind strayed from the meaning of the words before him. The book slowly closed in his hand, and he was looking into the dying embers of the fire. The March wind moaned and cried at the windows, but found no entrance to that warm, luxurious room. The flickering fire-light twinkled on polished oak and rich bindings and rare bronzes. His glance wandered slowly around the room, resting with a satisfied expression on each art treasure.

"This is a mighty comfortable den of mine," he said. "Wish I'd brought one of the boys home with me, so as to have some one to talk to. Guess I'll have to go to bed"—which he did.

## CHAPTER V

### TRIED FOR BURGLARY

The first three days of Mr. Stelwyn's attendance at court were not marked by any valuable services of his. He was called to the jury on a larceny case and was peremptorily excused by the lawyer for the defense. He could not imagine why he was not wanted, as he had never heard of the case nor the defendant nor the defendant's lawyer, but he accepted the snub with becoming meekness.

As the cases were all short ones, the jurymen not in actual service were obliged to remain within call during the sessions of the court. After the first day's experience Jack slipped a small volume into his pocket before leaving home, and by its aid, with the daily papers and an occasional stroll in the corridor for a cigarette, he managed to get through the dull hours.

On Thursday morning after the usual arguing of motions, the half hour of legal jargon which is a weariness to the flesh of all except the interested parties, the throng of lawyers hustled out of the court-room with their calf-skin volumes under their arms, and the Judge said :

"Number 320 is the next case on the docket. John Morliss. Burglary. Are you ready, gentlemen?"

"We are ready, your Honor," said the states-attorney.

"We are ready, your Honor," said another lawyer.

"Call a jury," said the Court.

The clerk stood up with a bunch of paper slips in his hand and called in stentorian tones, "John Stelwyn."

"Here I!" answered Stelwyn, as he folded his newspaper and stepped to the seats occupied by the jury.

The clerk continued to shout the names of other talesmen and Stelwyn looked carelessly about the court-room. He saw the states-attorney, Mr. Naylor, whom he knew quite well. He saw another lawyer, Mr. Fensom, whom he also knew. They were both members of his club. He also saw

several unknown gentlemen sitting near the tables on which Mr. Naylor and Mr. Fensom had spread sundry legal documents and sheets of blank paper. He saw a few men sitting somewhat back of the tables, among whom he recognized Mr. Coldart. His glance wandered idly to the left of the tables and he caught a glimpse of a man with gray hair and beard. A glimpse only, for in the instant his full gaze was centered upon the girl that sat at the old man's side. In that same instant Louise raised her eyes and looked straight into Stelwyn's eyes, and the quick, frank admiration in the one look, and the deep, pathetic pleading in the other look, told their stories with an unmistakable directness that no words could have conveyed.

Mr. Stelwyn felt an unknown and unaccountable thrill. He looked quickly away as if ashamed of meeting the gaze of those dark eyes. Louise turned toward her father.

"The jurors will rise and be sworn," said the Court.

Mechanically Jack stood up and raised his right hand with the other jurymen, while the clerk repeated some words, which he heard with the outer ear only.

"Mr. Stelwyn," said the states-attorney, "the prisoner here, John Morliss," he waved his hand toward the old man, "is indicted for the crime of burglary. Have you any knowledge of the case?"

"I have a vague remembrance of something in the newspapers about it," said Jack.

"Have you formed any opinion as to the guilt or innocence of the accused?"

"Not possible!" said Jack. "I have no knowledge on which to base an opinion."

"Do you know John Morliss, the prisoner?" another wave of the hand.

"Never saw him until to-day."

"I am aware that you know my learned friend Mr. Fensom, who represents the defendant."

Jack bowed. "As I also know Mr. Naylor."

"We accept Mr. Stelwyn," said the states-attorney.

Ralph Sconer, who was sitting near Mr. Fensom, leaned forward and whispered to the latter.

"Better challenge him peremptorily! He is a capitalist and *naturally prejudiced*," to which Mr. Fensom responded in the same tone. "I know him very well. He is too tender-

hearted to convict anything. He'll hang the jury if he don't force an acquittal." Then with a slight bow to Jack and a little movement of both hands as if questions were unnecessary, he said to the Court:

"We accept Mr. Stelwyn."

Then the lawyers attacked the other jurymen, and after excusing four for various reasons, one because he confessed that he was unable to read and had therefore never read of the case, they at last secured twelve men who knew nothing or thought nothing or cared nothing about John Morliss and his trial for burglary.

"The jury will rise and be sworn."

Again Jack stood up with the others and held up his right hand and listened to a jumble of words of which he caught, "Well and truly" and "help you God," and the jury sat down.

Whereupon, it being twelve o'clock, the Court adjourned, admonishing the jurors that they were to have no conversation with any one regarding the case and were to report promptly at two o'clock.

Through the examination of the jurors Morliss had looked on with a listless indifference, only seeming to rouse himself when his daughter touched his hand or whispered something in his ear. Then his face lighted up for a moment and his eyes lost their half-bewildered expression.

Louise had listened intently to every question and every answer, and she scanned the face of every juror as if searching for some ray of hope. When a gray-bearded farmer with a weather-beaten, kindly face, was accepted, she gave a little sigh of relief as if she had found a friend.

She sometimes glanced furtively at Stelwyn and Stelwyn often looked at her, but their eyes never met. As if by a tacit agreement they both avoided a second encounter.

As the throng passed quickly out of the court-room Stelwyn loitered until he saw the prisoner and his daughter leave with the gentleman who had sat near Mr. Fensom. Ralph Sconer was congratulating Morliss and Louise upon the excellent jury they had secured. Jack watched the three walk away together, then shrugged his shoulders and went to his club.

At two o'clock the jury and the lawyers and the defendant and the defendant's daughter, and the usual crowd of idlers, were all in their places. The tap of the gavel and the voice

beginning, "Hear ye!" and then running into a conglomeration of inarticulate sounds, announced the arrival of the Court, who came in from his sacred entrance with the ruddy face and placid smile of one who has had a good repast with good digestion to wait upon it.

"Read the indictment," said Judge Servem.

The clerk stood up and read rapidly something about "John Morliss" and "feloniously" and "Coldart and Goolie" and "situate upon the southwest corner of Sugar and Spice streets" and "said John Morliss" and "aforesaid premises" and "a certain package of money" and "said denomination" and the clerk sat down.

"You plead not guilty, Mr. Fensom?" said the Court.

"Not guilty, your honor."

"Proceed, Mr. Naylor," and the Court tipped back in his chair and braced one knee against the desk and looked intently at the dingy plaster capital of a column near the center of the court-room. Whereupon the states-attorney got upon his feet with a bunch of papers in his hand and stated to the "Gentlemen of the Jury" that this was a case of burglary. That the premises of Messrs. Coldart & Goolie had been entered on the night of February 14th and a package of ten thousand dollars had been abstracted from the vault, and that the state expected to prove by good and sufficient witnesses that the prisoner, John Morliss, was the man who had done the deed, "and as our first witness," continued Mr. Naylor, "I will call Sergeant James Mulcahy."

The policeman lumbered up to the witness stand, and, having been duly sworn, in his rich brogue told the story of his arrest of Morliss. How he had first seen him at about eleven o'clock with his coat collar turned up and his head bent, going toward the river. How he had next seen him running from in front of Coldart & Goolie's building at a little after one o'clock. How he had ordered him to halt and had finally checked him by a shot from his revolver. How he had seen the other policeman extract the package of greenbacks from the prisoner's pocket. How the prisoner at first stated that he had rescued the money from a burglar and had "tried de bluff act." How he gradually seemed to weaken and grow frightened as they neared the station.

*"It was me own expectation, yer honor,"* Mr. Mulcahy said to the Court in a confidential manner, *"dat de bloke would own up to de job before I got him to de station."*

"Answer the questions put to you by the counsel," said the Court severely, "and keep your expectations to yourself."

Cross-examined, the policeman's story was unshaken. He answered all questions readily with a placid smile of resignation, as if he felt this to be a conventional formality wholly useless in the present case.

The prisoner had shaken off his apathy. His eyes were keen and he leaned forward listening intently. The policeman's testimony brought him back to a realization of his dangerous position. Since his release on bail more than a month ago, he had deliberately shut out as far as possible all thought of the trial and its result.

With the careless improvidence of his character he had given himself up to the present enjoyment of his beloved art. The future could take care of itself. He would surely be acquitted. Innocent men were not sent to states prison except in romances. Ralph had employed a good lawyer for him. They would take care that all went well.

But as he heard the testimony of the first witness a dreadful uncertainty crept over him, the same paralyzing fear that he had felt on the night of his arrest. Those twelve men! Could they listen to such facts and believe him innocent? Dimly rose before him the familiar walls and grated windows of the penitentiary. He ground his teeth and shivered slightly, but the soft touch of his daughter's hand laid upon his own quieted him for the moment.

Cassidy, the second witness, corroborated the evidence of Mulcahy and farther testified as to his examination of the building, and his finding the window pried open, but the vault apparently undisturbed.

A short iron bar was introduced in evidence. The bar had been found on the morning after the burglary, hidden under some straw at the foot of the fire-escape.

"William Coldart."

Mr. Coldart took the witness stand, and after the usual preliminaries, was asked:

"Do you know the prisoner, Mr. Coldart?"

"He was a clerk in my employ for nearly a year."

"What was his character, Mr. Coldart?"

"I object," interrupted Mr. Fensom. "The witness can testify to what he knows."

"Objection sustained," said the Court. "You need not answer that question, Mr. Coldart."

"I will modify my question to suit my learned brother," said Mr. Naylor, smiling. "You may tell the jury what sort of a clerk the prisoner was when in your employ."

"He was a worthless, careless idler, rather a detriment than a benefit to the business."

"Did you discharge him, and if so when?"

"I discharged him on the afternoon of February 14th."

"Why did you discharge him?"

"Because of his utter worthlessness."

"Did you receive a package of money on the afternoon of February 14th?"

"We received a package of ten thousand dollars by express on the afternoon of February 14th."

"State to the jury what happened upon the arrival of that package."

Mr. Coldart then described how Mr. Sconer had taken the package to the private office, how it had been counted and recounted, and how he had instructed Mr. Sconer to put it in the vault for the night.

"Did you see the money placed in the vault?"

"I did."

"Where was the prisoner at that time?"

"When Mr. Sconer left the private office with the package, the prisoner stood near the door."

"Did the prisoner see the package placed in the vault?"

"Unquestionably."

"Could the prisoner have heard you counting the money?"

"He must have heard it."

"Take the witness."

Cross-examined, Mr. Coldart admitted that he had never known anything against the character of the prisoner other than his neglect of his duties as a clerk. He had never had reason to suspect the prisoner of dishonesty nor of any criminal practices. He had retained him in his employ long after he was satisfied of his uselessness, owing to the solicitations of his business manager, Mr. Sconer.

Ralph was looking at Louise when this testimony was given and he received a grateful glance, which somewhat lightened his heart.

Morliss still listened to every word, with strained intentness. *He never took his eyes from the witness, even to look at his daughter.*

"That will do, Mr. Coldart," said Mr. Fensom, and Mr. Coldart stepped down and picked up his coat and hat and left the court-room hurriedly as if he had already given too much of his valuable time to an unimportant matter.

"Ralph Sconer."

Ralph slowly mounted to the chair and was sworn.

In answer to the questions of the State he corroborated Mr. Coldart's account of the receipt of the money and the placing it in the vault.

"How long have you known the prisoner?"

"For over two years."

"Were you on intimate terms with him? Did you visit at his house?"

"Yes."

"Did you know of his discharge from the employ of Coldart & Goolie at the time?"

"I did."

"Did you converse with the prisoner in regard to this discharge?"

"I did."

"How did the prisoner express himself to you about the matter? Did he seem angry?"

"He did not. He admitted the justice of his discharge and seemed rather to blame himself than any one else."

"H'm. Did he not appear discouraged or somewhat hopeless as to his future?"

"To a certain degree, yes."

"Ah! To a certain degree! Is it not true, Mr. Sconer, that he was *very much* discouraged, almost desperate in fact?"

"Hardly so bad as that."

"Mr. Sconer, where and at what hour did you last see the prisoner on the night of February 14th?"

"At his own house at about nine o'clock."

"Did he leave the house at that time?"

"He did."

"Did he state to you or in your hearing where he was going?"

"He stated merely that he was going for a walk."

"Did he say why he wanted to take a walk at nine o'clock in the evening?"

"I believe he said something about wanting to get out where he could think."

“Did he say what he wanted to think about?”

“I suppose about the loss of his position and the best way to secure another.”

“We don’t want your suppositions, Mr. Sconer. We want facts, if you please. Did he, the prisoner, say anything about *money* on that occasion?”

“He may have done so.”

“Come, come, Mr. Sconer. Your memory is an excellent one. Did not the prisoner say that he must have money?”

“I believe he said that he must think of a way to earn some money.”

“‘Earn some money?’ Will you swear that he used the word *earn*? Is it not a fact, Mr. Sconer, that the prisoner stated that he *must have* money, that he was going out to think of some way to *get* some money?”

“I could not swear that he said that.”

“But you could not swear that he did not say that?”

“No, sir.”

“No, I thought not. Mr. Sconer, when you opened the vault in your office on the morning of February 15th did you experience any difficulty? Did the combination work properly?”

“It did.”

“Was there anything to indicate any previous *forcible* entrance of the vault?”

“I opened the vault very hurriedly. I did not observe anything wrong.”

“But if there had been anything wrong you must have observed it. Is not that a fact?”

“Probably.”

“Is it not *certainly* so?”

“I think so.”

“Mr. Sconer,” said the states-attorney, leaning toward the witness and speaking slowly and impressively, “when the combination in that vault was set was there any one present beside yourself and the operator?”

“No one.”

“Then at that time you alone aside from the operator possessed the knowledge of the combination?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Did you communicate your knowledge to Mr. Coldart and to Mr. Goolie?”

"I did."

"Mr. Sconer, did you tell any one else the numbers of that combination?"

"I did."

"To how many others did you impart that valuable knowledge. To two, or three, or a dozen, or —"

"To one man only."

"Ah! To one man only. Mr. Sconer, what was the name of that man?"

"John Morliss."

"The prisoner?"

"The prisoner."

The distinguished attorney leaned back in his chair and took out his handkerchief. For a moment there was absolute silence in the court.

"I would like to state," began Ralph.

Instantly the states-attorney was bolt upright again.

"Excuse me, Mr. Sconer," he interrupted. "You will kindly confine yourself to answering my questions. Did you see the prisoner at the station on the morning after his arrest?"

"I did," answered Ralph sharply. The witness was evidently growing angry.

"Did the prisoner tell you substantially the same story which he told at his examination by the officer in charge of the station?"

"Exactly the same."

"That he had *happened* to be in front of Coldart & Goolie's at one o'clock at night, had seen an unknown man, a total stranger to him, descending the fire-escape, had seized this stranger and without wasting any time in conversation, or asking any permission, had put his hand in this stranger's pocket and extracted a package of ten thousand dollars and put it in his own pocket; had then permitted this stranger to go on his way, and when the policeman came round the corner had suddenly decided to run after the stranger. That is the story, isn't it?"

"The prisoner's statement is on record, sir. It is unnecessary for you to garble it."

"But, that is substantially the story that the prisoner told you, isn't it?"

"The statement is on record, sir. It agrees with what he told to me."

"Mr. Sconer," the attorney leaned forward again. "Did you believe that story of the prisoner's?"

"I object," thundered Mr. Fensom, springing to his feet.

"You need not answer," said the Court.

But simultaneously with the Court's order Ralph said, in a strong, clear voice:

"I believed that the prisoner was utterly incapable of the crime of burglary or of any crime, even the smallest on the statutes."

The states-attorney was now on his feet. "Answer my question without comment," shouted he.

"I object," said Mr. Fensom.

"Gentlemen," said the Court, "be seated. The question and the answer will be omitted from the record. Both are improper."

But Ralph smiled. He had got ahead of the lawyer and made his statement before the jury, and another grateful glance from Louise rewarded him.

As he stepped down after a brief cross-examination the prisoner looked at him and smiled, the first semblance of cheerfulness he had shown, and throughout the court-room there was a movement that seemed to indicate a slight sentiment in favor of the prisoner.

The waiter who had served Morliss and Sconer at Maguire's saloon was called to the stand and testified to having drawn some twelve glasses of beer for the pair. He recognized the prisoner as the man who entered the saloon with Sconer. Thomas Sconer, Ralph's father, he had known for years. Did not hear much of the conversation. The prisoner seemed very angry about something. Heard him swearing at Coldart & Goolie. Once or twice the prisoner brought his fist down on the table. Heard the words, "ten thousand dollars" several times. Had heard Sconer say he was sleepy and saw him leave the saloon shortly afterward. Time, about ten-fifteen he should think. Did not notice particularly.

Had served the prisoner with one glass of beer after Sconer left. The prisoner sat at the table for nearly an hour alone. Seemed to be thinking deeply.

No material points were brought out by the cross-examination.

*"Thomas Sconer."*

As the name was called, Mr. Stelwyn, who was looking at the prisoner, and warily at the prisoner's daughter, saw the former start suddenly and the latter lean forward and whisper to him. He also saw the old man shake his head and turn from his daughter somewhat angrily. Then he saw the prisoner lean forward and grasp the rail in front of him with both hands and he fancied he saw a change come over his face, whether an emotion of fear or of anger he could not determine.

Mr. Thomas Sconer slowly made his way from the rear of the court-room. Ralph Sconer looked at him for an instant and then whispered something to Mr. Fensom. The latter shook his head and shrugged his shoulders. The states-attorney glanced at his opponent with a pleasant smile and began his examination of the witness.

"Mr. Sconer, you are acquainted with the prisoner, John Morliss?"

"I've known him near about a year."

"Are you employed by Coldart & Goolie?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you see the prisoner on the evening of February 14th?"

"I did."

"You may state to the jury where and at what time on that evening you saw the prisoner and what conversation, if any, you had with him."

Mr. Sconer hitched forward in his chair and put his hand to his collar as if it were a trifle too small for his neck. Mr. Stelwyn still watching the prisoner and his daughter, fancied that he saw the old man's grasp tighten on the rail before him and his eyes assume a fierce expression. He also fancied that the daughter was a shade paler than she had been. Both were intently watching the witness.

"Well, gentlemen," said Mr. Sconer, "it was this way. I was passing Billy Maguire's saloon about nine o'clock when I see Morliss with his head down comin' along the sidewalk. 'Hulloo, Morliss,' says I. 'Hulloo, Sconer,' says he, lookin' up. 'What's wrong with you!' says I. 'I'm in hard luck,' says he. 'I'm damned near desprit.' 'Sho!' says I. 'Come in and have a drink.' Well, we went into Billy Maguire's and went to a table and I set up the beers."

*The witness paused.*

"Go on," said the states-attorney. "What did you talk about?"

"Well, sir," the witness seemed reluctant. "He told me that Coldart & Goolie had discharged him."

"Well, well, what then?"

"Well, he swore at them pretty heavy. I tried to stop him, but the more I said the madder he got."

"And then?"

"Then he said he'd get even with them some way. Said he knew a good way, too."

"Did he tell you what way?"

"No, sir; he never said what way, but he just kept sayin' he knew a good way."

"Did he say anything about any money?"

Again the witness hesitated as if reluctant.

"Come, come, what did he say about money?"

"Well, he kept talkin' about ten thousand dollars all the time he was swearin' at Coldart & Goolie. Said ten thousand dollars was nothing to them. He said they got that much every day, and then he'd swear at them again for firin' him, and kep' on sayin' he'd get even with 'em."

"Did the prisoner tell you that he had seen a package of ten thousand dollars received at the office that afternoon?"

"No, sir."

A strange, half-choked ejaculation from the prisoner caused every one to look suddenly away from the witness. They only saw the prisoner's daughter leaning in front of her father and stroking his hand.

Ralph Sconer sat with his head resting on his hand gazing at the floor. He had not once looked up during the examination.

"At what time did you leave the saloon, Mr. Sconer?"

"At about ten o'clock or a little later."

"Did the prisoner leave with you?"

"No, sir."

"Did he give any reason for not going?"

"He said he had a scheme and he wanted to think it out."

"Upon leaving the saloon where did you go?"

"Straight home to bed."

"Did you see the prisoner again before his arrest?"

"No, sir."

"That will do, Mr. Sconer. Your Honor, we rest our case," and the states-attorney leaned back in his chair and clasped his hands behind his head with the air of a man who had done a good day's work and felt pleased with it.

The cross-examination failed to confuse Mr. Sconer or to change his testimony, except in minor points, such as the exact language used by the prisoner, which the witness was not willing to swear to. The effect of his testimony on the ordinary listener was very damaging to the prisoner's cause, especially as it was apparently given with great reluctance.

When excused, Sconer took a seat just behind the rail and near one of Coldart & Goolie's clerks, who had been summoned as a witness for the defence.

"Mr. Fensom," said the Court, "the field is yours, sir. Call your witnesses."

Mr. Fensom rose and said: "Your Honor, and gentlemen of the jury, I am about to call upon the prisoner himself to tell his own simple story. Mr. Morliss, will you take the stand?"

The prisoner rose slowly and came forward. His face was flushed and his forehead wrinkled and his eyes had the fierce look of a man hunted down and brought to bay, or of one who had taken a stern resolve. Stelwyn, who had been watching him narrowly, could not decide which meaning to attach to the expression, but he had a vague feeling that something unusual was about to happen. And from the hush that came over the court-room it seemed that others shared his feeling.

Mr. Morliss held up his right hand, which visibly trembled, and when the clerk had read the form of oath, he repeated after him slowly and distinctly, "So help me God!"

"Mr. Morliss," said Mr. Fensom, "at what time did you leave your house on the evening of February 14th?"

"At about half-past eight or nine."

"Were you feeling angry or disturbed when you left the house?"

"I was."

At this point Ralph leaned forward and whispered something to the lawyer, who nodded and continued.

"Was your anger due to causes connected with your business affairs?"

"Partially so."

"You may tell the jury what happened on the evening of February 14th after you left your house."

The prisoner had not changed his stern, resolute expression since he took the stand. His answers were given in a strong, clear, level tone. He began his narrative with the same manner and tone.

"I was angry and nervous. I wanted to walk far and fast—to do something to calm myself. In my irritation I tore down a part of the board fence on Norden Street and worked hard pulling up the posts. Then I walked down town, and in front of Maguire's saloon I met that—man."

The prisoner raised his arm and pointed at Thomas Sconer, while he glared at him for an instant with a look full of hatred.

Every one looked in the direction indicated by the old man's finger. Sconer smiled indifferently and whispered something to the clerk that sat near him.

"I met that Thomas Sconer," continued the prisoner slowly, lowering his arm, but keeping his eyes fixed on Sconer. "We went into the saloon together and we drank beer together. I told him of my discharge. I grew angry as I talked of it. I swore at Coldart & Goolie. It made me furious to remember their wealth and to think that they would grudge an old clerk the paltry sum that they paid him, and which was all he had to live on. I told that man that I had seen ten thousand dollars placed in their vault that very afternoon."

Sconer shook his head and smiled and the prisoner half raised his arm and let it fall again.

"At eleven o'clock," he continued, still with his eyes on Sconer, "I left the saloon. I was hot and angry. I was not ready to go home. I went down Sugar Street to the river and out to the end of the wharf and sat down. At one o'clock my anger was over and I started for home. At the alley, in the rear of Coldart & Goolie's, I saw a man descending the fire-escape ladder. I remembered the ten thousand dollars and I drew back and waited. When the man came out of the alley I seized him and dragged him into the street."

The prisoner paused for an instant, and drew a long breath. Then he suddenly stood up and once more pointing with outstretched arm straight at Sconer, said in a loud, clear voice:

"So help me God, that man was Thomas Sconer, who sits there."

In the intense silence that followed, Sconer turned carelessly to his companion and said in an undertone that was heard throughout the room:

"I told you the old man was crazy."

Four voices sounded almost simultaneously. The voice of the Judge commanding "silence in the court!" Louise's quick, frightened cry, "Father!" The sharp call of Jack Stelwyn, "Look out there!" and loud above all the hoarse shout of the prisoner, "Liar! Let me get one more grip on you!" as he sprang from the witness stand straight toward Sconer.

The lawyers scattered right and left. Ralph Sconer seized him by the arm, but was thrown aside like a child, and in the instant Morliss was in the grasp of two stout policemen. For some seconds the three swayed back and forth together. Then a sharp click was heard and the prisoner, with hand-cuffs on his wrists, was forced into a chair, where he sat panting, his head sunk on his breast.

Louise was at his side the instant the officers released him and as she saw the handcuffs she gave a quick gasp. Then she straightened herself and stood erect by her father's chair and looked the Judge full in the eyes as she said in a clear voice that vibrated through the room:

"Will your Honor please order them to remove those things? My father will not forget himself again. I will be responsible for him."

There might have seemed something ludicrous in the idea of that slight young girl promising to be responsible for the behavior of an infuriated man, but no one smiled, though every eye was fixed on her and every ear heard her words.

Jack Stelwyn drew a long breath and whispered, "By Jove!" between his teeth.

The Court nearly blushed, and said sternly to the policeman: "Remove the handcuffs, officer." Then, with a courteous bow to the young lady: "Please be seated, Miss Morliss. Your father shall not suffer any indignity."

But Louise continued to stand until the prisoner's hands were free. Then she bowed slightly to the Judge and said, "Thank you," and sat down at her father's side.

*The old man was crushed and subdued. His flash of fury*

*PROPV*

had burned itself out and left him exhausted and once more apathetic.

Ralph and Mr. Fensom were whispering earnestly together.

"Do you wish to continue the examination, Mr. Fensom?" asked the Court.

"It is unnecessary, your Honor," replied the lawyer. "The prisoner has made his statement."

"Mr. Naylor."

"We waive cross-examination, your Honor," said the states-attorney, with a slight shrug.

"Call your next witness, Mr. Fensom."

"Mr. Ralph Sconer."

Again Ralph took the stand. He was evidently preoccupied and embarrassed, and several times asked the attorney to repeat the question. He testified to his long and intimate acquaintance with the prisoner and his knowledge of the prisoner's simple, upright life. That the prisoner was devoted to art, and thought and talked of art whenever he could find an opportunity or a listener. That he was an enthusiast on the subject. That his shortcomings as a clerk were known by many to be solely due to this all-engrossing passion. That he had never heard the prisoner express a desire for money except for a sufficient amount to enable him to live and give his time to his painting. That he had always believed him the most upright and honorable man of his acquaintance. That the vault in the office was intended only as a book-vault and was rarely used as a depository for money or valuables. That he had given the prisoner the combination because it was necessary to entrust it to one of the clerks in case he should himself be absent, and that he had selected the prisoner because of his implicit confidence in his honesty.

"That's all, Mr. Sconer," said Mr. Fensom.

"One moment, Mr. Sconer," said the states-attorney, as Ralph rose. "Your Honor," he continued, to the Court: "We do not care to cross-examine the witness. We have no issue with any statement he has made. But it will be necessary for me to recall this witness on the direct, in rebuttal of *certain new testimony* offered by the first witness for the defense. *If the Court has no objection I will take the witness as my own while he is in the chair.*"

"Proceed, Mr. Naylor," said the Court.

"Mr. Sconer, are you the son of Thomas Sconer, the last witness for the state?"

"I am."

"Does your father occupy a room adjoining yours?"

"He does."

"On the evening of February 14th, at what time did you reach your room?"

"At about eleven o'clock."

"Did you look in your father's room to see if he had yet come home?"

"I did not."

"How long were you awake, Mr. Sconer?"

"I went to bed at about half past twelve and was awake for some time. I heard the clock strike two."

"Did you hear your father come in?"

"I did not."

"Mr. Sconer, in your judgment, would it have been possible for your father to come to his room and go to bed without your knowledge, if you were in your room?"

"I think not," said Ralph.

"You feel very sure that it would be impossible, do you not?"

"Reasonably sure."

"Mr. Sconer, was your father in his room in the morning?"

"He was. We breakfasted together."

"You noticed nothing unusual in his manner at breakfast?"

"Nothing."

"Mr. Sconer, don't you believe that your father was already in bed when you reached your room at eleven o'clock?"

Ralph hesitated, and looked at his lawyer. The latter was turning over some papers, apparently paying no attention to the examination.

"I did believe so," said Ralph.

"Don't you believe so now?"

The Judge, who had been glaring for some moments at the oblivious Fensom, here interrupted sharply:

"*You need not answer that question, witness.*"

"*I beg the Court's pardon,*" said the states-attorney, with

a smile. "We withdraw the question. That is all, Mr. Sconer."

"Mr. Fensom," said the Judge, in an irritated tone, "Do you wish to cross-examine?"

"No, your Honor," said Fensom, looking up carelessly from his papers.

"Then call your next witness."

The next and final witness for the defense was the clerk from Coldart & Goolie's.

He could only swear to a year's acquaintance with the prisoner, during which the prisoner had done him many little favors, lending him small sums when he needed money, and helping him with his work when he got behind. He believed the prisoner to be a simple, kind-hearted old man, incapable of committing any crime or of doing wrong to anyone.

The defense rested its case.

The states-attorney stood up and began his opening plea.

"May it please the Court:

"Gentlemen of the jury, it is entirely unnecessary for me to plead the cause of the state in this case. The evidence which you have heard is clear, convincing, and absolutely uncontroverted. Let me only beg your patience for a few moments while I recapitulate and arrange that evidence, so that you may see its full meaning at a glance.

First: As to the character of the prisoner. We are told, gentlemen, by his own witnesses, his own friends, that he is a dreamer, an *enthusiast*. An enthusiast, gentlemen, is ever an uncertainty. He is liable to be carried by the strength of his emotions to actions which seem entirely out of keeping with his usual behavior. Many, if not most, of the so-called anarchists are enthusiasts, and the fiery impulse of their enthusiasm but too frequently transforms them from peaceable, respected citizens, into raging demons who for the time seek only to burn, kill and destroy. Of the possibilities of such enthusiasm in the prisoner you have been yourselves the witnesses. Were it not for timely intervention he would doubtless, here before you all, have added the crime of murder to the crime of burglary.

"Given such a character, let us look at the undisputed facts as tendered in evidence:

"*This man was naturally and inevitably a careless, worth-*

less clerk. He was discharged for ample and sufficient reasons, but to his *enthusiastic* mind his discharge was a gross injustice, something to be revenged. He will find a way to get even with these wealthy scoundrels who have dared to deprive him of the salary which he was *not* earning.

"He has seen a package of ten thousand dollars placed in the vault. *He alone* except the firm and the business manager knows the combination of that vault. He goes home brooding over his anger, and his anger grows with the brooding. He leaves the house in a desperate mood, with the statement that he is going out to think how to *get* some money—that he must have money. In a fit of *enthusiasm* he tears down a few lengths of innocent fence—so he says. He goes to a beer saloon and drinks a half dozen glasses of beer; talks fiercely and wildly to his companion about his unjust discharge; swears at his former employers, and reiterates his determination to "get even with them"—talks wildly about ten thousand dollars. Remember, gentlemen, this is your enthusiast, not your professional criminal.

"He is left alone in the saloon to ponder over his scheme of revenge and his scheme of getting money. The two schemes have been already united into one scheme.

"He leaves the saloon at eleven o'clock, and instead of going home he turns up his coat collar, lowers his head so as to hide his face as much as possible, and slinks down toward the river and toward the office of Coldart & Goolie.

"At one o'clock at night a policeman turns the corner of Spice and Sugar streets and sees a man running from in front of Coldart & Goolie's toward that safe hiding place, the river front. The policeman shouts an order to halt. The man runs the faster. The policeman fires his revolver and the man stops. In that man's pocket is found the package of ten thousand dollars taken from Coldart & Goolie's vault. The window of the office has been pried up, but the vault has not been forced. It has been opened by the combination, and this man who has been arrested, this John Morliss whom you are trying, is the only man who knows that combination.

"You have listened to the statement of the absurd story which the prisoner told to the policeman, to the lieutenant at the station, and later to his friend, Mr. Ralph Sconer—that he had *seized* an *unknown* man, and taken the money from

his pocket, and, having secured the money, was running after the man. You have heard of his weakness, his paralysis of fear when confronted by the officer at the station.

"Gentlemen, you listened to the damning testimony of Thomas Sconer, who heard the prisoner's conversation at the saloon, and you were then regaled by one of the prisoner's *enthusiasms*, when in a fit of furious rage and with the emotion of revenge over-riding all fears for his own safety, he himself gave the lie direct to his former statements and proclaimed Thomas Sconer to be the '*unknown*' man whom he claimed to have seized.

"The rebuttal of such evidence was unnecessary, but it was amply furnished by the statement of Ralph Sconer, the prisoner's friend, whom he had utterly forgotten in his fierce rage for revenge.

"Gentlemen, the evidence before you needs no comments nor explanations. The character of the man, the evident motives, the unbroken chain of admitted facts, lead directly and unerringly to a conviction of the guilt of the prisoner."

Mr. Naylor bowed to the Court and to the jury, and sat down.

The prisoner was sitting with head bent and hands resting on the arms of his chair. The daughter leaned her forehead upon her left hand and partly shielded her eyes, while her right hand lay upon the hand of her father.

Mr. Fensom rose to make his plea for the defense. He eloquently urged the jurors to beware of the dangers of circumstantial evidence. Such evidence, he pleaded, as would seem sufficient for a man's guidance in the ordinary walks of life should never be considered sufficient when the life or liberty of a fellow-citizen were at stake. Only the most absolute and indisputable connection of circumstances without a break or a flaw in the chain should justify a verdict of "guilty."

He leaned toward the jury and talked to them and pleaded with them in a conversational tone, looking earnestly into the face of each man as if the whole matter rested with that man alone. Jack Stelwyn had by far the largest share of his attention, and Jack returned his gaze with the cold stare of *a graven image*, and the instant Mr. Fensom transferred his *eloquence to another jurymen*, Jack looked at the father and *the daughter*, and his eyes lost their stony impenetrability.

Mr. Fensom dwelt at length upon the simple, generous, artistic nature of the prisoner. (He did not use the word "enthusiasm.")

He labored to show that a deliberate crime—a crime for personal gain, was incompatible with such a nature, and his earnest persuasive tone and the appearance of deep feeling repressed behind his words, had such an effect that when he closed his plea there was a subdued murmur of sympathy throughout the court room.

But Mr. Naylor was again upon his feet, and his very manner before he spoke, was enough to check the wave of popular emotion that had followed the pathetic plea of the prisoner's counsel.

"Gentlemen of the jury," he said, coldly but earnestly. "I have but a few words to add in closing the case. Never forget, gentlemen, that you are citizens of this state, that your duty and your oath as jurors require you to protect and defend and uphold the law. Sympathy for an individual is honorable and commendable, but that sympathy must not extend to weakness; to the weakness of defeating the law which is made by us all for the benefit of us all. Gentlemen, you are the judges of that law and you are the judges of the facts in this case. Let justice be done though the heavens fall.

"Gentlemen, I thank you for your attention. The State, of which you are citizens, leaves its case in your hands."

"The jury will rise and receive the instructions of the Court," said the Judge.

The jury stood up and the Court read brief instructions, wherein it was stated that the prisoner must have the benefit of the presumption of innocence, that it lay with the state to prove his guilt, and that if the evidence introduced by the state was not sufficient to convince them beyond a reasonable doubt of the guilt of the prisoner, they must bring in a verdict of acquittal. That they must consider all the evidence, the manner and bearing and apparent credibility of the witnesses, and that the prisoner's own testimony must be regarded as that of an interested party. If the jury found from the evidence that the prisoner was guilty, they must bring in a verdict of "*Guilty as Indicted*" and fix the punishment at a term of imprisonment not exceeding twenty years in the state penitentiary.

The Judge handed the instructions to the bailiff, and said :  
"The jury will retire and consider their verdict."

Following the lead of the bailiff the twelve jurymen filed out of the court. Jack Stelwyn hoped for another appealing look from the prisoner's daughter, but she still sat motionless, with her hand half-covering her eyes, and did not look up until the last jurymen had left the court room.

It was half-past five in the afternoon.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE JUDGMENT OF TWELVE MEN

The jury-room into which Mr. Stelwyn and his eleven associates were locked, seemed purposely adapted to the securing of speedy verdicts. There were few consciences so robust as to endure a long imprisonment in that place without making cowards of their owners.

The floor was bare, the walls were of dingy white plaster, the windows without shades or curtains, and the furniture consisted of a long table, twelve exceedingly uncomfortable wooden chairs, and three large receptacles for tobacco juice and cigar stumps. Previous occupants of this room had availed themselves of the privileges of these receptacles to the full extent. The room was unventilated, and the atmosphere was suggestive of a closed street car when there is not "room for one more."

As soon as the door was closed Mr. Stelwyn lighted a cigarette. His example was at once followed by eight other jurymen, four of whom smoked cigars, while the other four produced pipes of different descriptions, and filled them with tobaccoes of different complexions.

Three unfortunates had never learned to smoke, and they paid dearly for their neglect of early opportunities. In a few moments they began to cough and to grow pale, and would gladly have voted to hang the most innocent man in the world or to set the most desperate criminal at liberty, if either vote would have let them out of that room.

Among twelve men there is always at least one who is anxious to force himself into prominence of some sort. Mr. Dapper, a smart young dry-goods clerk, took the initiative with our jury. "Gentlemen," he said, in a loud, commanding voice. "I suppose our first business is to choose a foreman. Mr. Larkspur here tells me that he has served on a jury several times, and as he is probably the oldest man

among us, I move you that he be chosen as our foreman. Does anyone second the motion?"

"Second the motion," said one of the non-smokers, feebly.

"Gentlemen," continued Mr. Dapper, "it is moved and seconded that Mr. Larkspur be requested to act as foreman of this jury. All in favor of the motion will say 'aye.' "

A half dozen voices grunted "aye."

"Contrary minded 'No.' "

There were no contrary minds.

"The ayes have it," said Mr. Dapper. "Mr. Larkspur, will you take a chair at the head of the table?"

Mr. Larkspur was the old farmer whose kindly face had brought comfort to Louise.

"Wal, gentlemen," said he. "Sence ye seem to wish it, I'm willin' to sarve ye," and he took a chair and put on his glasses.

"I think, Mr. Foreman," said Mr. Dapper, "it would be well for you to direct someone to read the Court's instructions again before we proceed to voting and discussions."

"Hay?" said Mr. Larkspur. "Yes, I guess that's right. Jest you read them instructions, Mr. Dapper."

So the little clerk stood up and puffed out his chest and read the instructions in a sonorous voice, carefully imitating the inflections of the Judge.

Two members of the jury had drifted together and sat smoking short pipes and villainous tobacco in one corner of the room. They were not fair to look upon nor pleasant to be near.

"How d'ye think it's goin'?" asked one in a low tone.

"They'll be all for guilty, 'cept pr'aps the dude. I seen him lookin' at the gal. Guess he's a soft one."

"We'd best vote for 'not' eh?—first time."

"Right you are! Hold 'em out till they have to give us a supper and bed."

"Wal, gentlemen," said the foreman, looking over his glasses. "You've hearn the instructions—what's yer will?"

"I suggest that we take a vote, Mr. Foreman," said Mr. Dapper. "Then we can see if any discussion is necessary. I will prepare the ballots," and he began tearing up some *blank paper* into small strips. "The first question, gentlemen of the jury, is whether the prisoner is guilty or not guilty. After that is decided we can agree as to the punishment."

(It was evident what Mr. Dapper's verdict would be.) "Let each gentleman write on one of these slips 'Guilty' or else 'Not Guilty,' and I will collect the ballots."

The jurymen crowded around the table and wrote their verdicts. The two gentlemen in the corner looked at each other, and one wrote "Not guilty" and the other wrote "Not guilty." Mr. Dapper passed round the hat and the ballots were dumped out on the table before the foreman and counted by Mr. Dapper.

"There appears to be some misunderstanding, or else some ill-timed joke," said Mr. Dapper, frowning and looking about the room in a dignified manner. "We have here six votes for 'Guilty,' five votes for 'Not Guilty,' and one ballot on which is written 'Guilty or else not guilty.'"

Mr. Dapper held the questionable ballot at the extremity of his extended right arm and looked searchingly into the face of each juryman.

Everybody laughed except one man, and he looked about with an expression of stupid amazement.

"Well, what's the matter?" he said at length. "I wrote them words. I hearn ye say yerself that every gentleman was to write "Guilty or else not guilty" on them slips of paper. If that ain't what ye want, why don't ye say what ye do want?"

This time there was a roar of laughter, and the delinquent said, angrily: "Well, you fellers think yer damn smart, maybe. I never was on no jury before—I dunno what ye want."

"All we want, my friend," said Mr. Dapper, in a pacific tone, "is for you to tell us whether you think the prisoner is guilty or not guilty."

"What prisoner?"

"Why, John Morliss, the man that we tried for stealing ten thousand dollars."

"That feller that jumped for the other feller and got collared?"

"Yes, surely."

"You mean do I think he stole the ten thousand dollars?"

"Certainly, that's it."

"Of course I think he stole it. Any fool would know that. Didn't that lawyer tell us so?"

"All right," said Mr. Dapper. "But you ought to have

written 'Guilty' on your ballot: Well, gentlemen, we are now seven to five for conviction. It seems to me, gentlemen, that with such evidence as we heard at this trial there ought to be no question as to the prisoner's guilt. I should like to hear from one of the five gentlemen who think he is not guilty."

No one responded.

Jack Stelwyn was walking up and down with his hands in his pockets.

"Are the gentlemen that voted for acquittal willing to admit it?" said Mr. Dapper.

"I voted for acquittal," said Jack, stopping suddenly and facing the speaker.

"Would you mind giving us your reasons, Mr. Stelwyn?" Mr. Dapper was on tiptoe for an argument.

"My reasons? Because I believe the man innocent, of course," and he resumed his walk.

"Wal," said the old foreman, "I voted 'Not guilty,' too. Dunno's I'm right. 'T looks as though he stole the money. But it's kind a hard to take that purty young gal's father away. They think a heap of each other. Any one kin see that. I got a gal 'bout that size to hum."

"Yes, Mr. Larkspur," said Mr. Dapper. "It's a sad case—a sad case, gentlemen, but we often meet such cases, and we must not forget that we are here to do our duty as citizens, however painful. The prisoner is unquestionably guilty—" and Mr. Dapper launched himself into a turbulent sea of rhetorical declamation in which his flounderings were observed by Mr. Larkspur and two or three other jurymen.

Four or five gentlemen gathered about Stelwyn and essayed to convince him of the error of his views—but, without saying much, Jack appeared to be somewhat stubborn.

One jurymen, a real-estate broker, had been looking at his watch nervously. At last he approached the group and said: "See here, Stelwyn, I know how you feel. I'm just that way myself. I voted for acquittal first time. Didn't feel quite convinced, you know. But I guess these gentlemen are right. There's no use in making an all-night job of it. If I can catch the seven o'clock train I can get home. *I'm going to vote with the majority.*"

*The two gentlemen with the short pipes were keeping watch of the proceedings.*

"Stelwyn'll hold 'em," said one with a wink.

"You bet! He's a stayer."

"Guess we're safe to vote the other way this time."

"Yep."

Some one called for another ballot, which was taken, with a result of eleven for conviction to one for acquittal.

"I'm the odd one," said Stelwyn, placidly, when the vote was announced. He lighted another cigarette and sat down with a defiantly indifferent manner.

There was a struggle going on within Mr. Stelwyn. He was not accustomed to hesitate in his decisions, and this perplexity was an irritating novelty. On the ~~one~~ hand his clear, logical mind had accepted the fact that the great preponderance of evidence was against the prisoner. On the other hand a something which he could not formulate made him *feel* that the prisoner was innocent. He tried vainly to find a reason for that feeling. He acknowledged to himself his deep sympathy with the prisoner's daughter and his desire to help her, but neither the sympathy nor the desire appeared sufficient to explain his unwillingness to render a verdict of guilty. Jack had not been in the habit of analyzing his mental processes or of deducing his motives of action. This occasion was a puzzler for him. If he had expressed himself at all he would have said that he was *convinced* that the man was guilty, but *felt* that he was innocent. The fact that he was alone in his opinion among twelve men doubtless had an unacknowledged weight with him. His crust of worldly experience, his everyday man's conscience, resisted the extreme individualism of keeping eleven men in confinement on account of a non-conformity for which he could give no reasonable excuse. He sat smoking his cigarette and trying to think, while a half dozen men thronged around him and presented the case in every phase that their six imaginations could originate. He heard scraps of argument here and bits of argument there. He heard the remarks of others who were walking impatiently about the room.

"It's a beastly shame!"

"The idea of eleven men having to stay in this hole for a man that don't know his own mind!"

"Might as well be the prisoner and done with it!"

The two gentlemen with the short pipes looked on *anxiously*.

At last Jack stood up and threw his cigarette on the floor with an angry gesture.

"Take your ballot. I will vote for conviction."

The ballots were taken and counted. Ten for "guilty" and two for "not guilty."

Amid the surprised and indignant exclamations Stelwyn strode to the table and struck it with his fist.

"We will have no more of this," he said. "Mr. Foreman, I call for a rising vote. Let every man who votes for 'guilty' stand up."

Every man in the room stood up.

"Prepare your verdict, you, Dapper, there, and let's sign it at once. Some one thump on the door and call that damned bailiff."

"Hold on, Mr. Stelwyn," said Dapper. "We are forgetting something. We must decide on the number of years' punishment. Shall we make it twenty years, gentlemen?"

"What's the least we can make it?" asked Stelwyn.

"One year."

"Gentlemen," said Stelwyn, "I wish to state positively and finally that I shall never vote for a longer term of imprisonment than one year—not if I am kept in this room for that entire year."

There was an ugly gleam of determination in his eyes, as he looked slowly about the room.

"Now," he continued, "we can settle this matter at once. Will all who are in favor of fixing the punishment at one year, please stand up?"

All the jurors rose except the two gentlemen with the short pipes, and Mr. Dapper.

Jack looked sternly at the two conspirators.

"Gentlemen," said he, with a drawling emphasis, "this evening's entertainment is over. Please rise."

"Well," said one, slowly, "I guess we'll have to go with the boys," and they both stood up.

"Now, Dapper," said Stelwyn.

"All right, Mr. Stelwyn. You yielded a point to me—I'll meet you," and Mr. Dapper came up smiling.

"Excuse me, sir," said Jack, "I have yielded no point to you. Please draw up your verdict."

*In ten minutes the verdict bore the signatures of twelve good men and true. First, the large, sprawling signature*

of "Hiram Larkspur, Foreman," then the curving, flowing gracefulness of "Philip L. Dapper," with an intricate flourish beneath it, and last of all the bold, square characters of "John G. Stelwyn."

So our friend Mr. Stelwyn had made compromise with his conscience, utterly illogical, as such compromises usually are. The man of the world had achieved a victory over the better man when he had announced his willingness to vote for a verdict of guilty. John Stelwyn, the better man, had regretted that announcement as soon as uttered, but John Stelwyn, the man of the world, could not stultify himself by retracting an important decision. Therefore the better man would assert himself by fighting to the death to secure the lightest possible punishment for a man who, if guilty at all, was an utter scoundrel and hypocrite, and deserving of the heaviest penalty.

It would have been much easier for you, Jack, had you given the better man the aid of your force and presence and determination, at first instead of at last.

After some pounding on the door, the bailiff appeared.

"Agreed on a verdict, gentlemen?" he asked.

"Yes, yes, long ago," said the real-estate man. "Hurry up, I've only got twenty minutes to catch my train."

"Well, you're just in time, boys," said the bailiff. "The Judge said he'd wait for you until seven o'clock. Come on."

The jury followed the officer back to the court room and took their places, and at the same time the Judge entered from his private door.

Jack looked about the dimly-lighted court room. The states-attorney and Mr. Fensom were in their places. Five spectators occupied seats behind the rail. Ralph Sconer stood near the prisoner and his daughter.

Morliss sat erect, with his hands grasping the arms of his chair, and looked eagerly at the jury. Louise was still sitting with one hand shading her face and the other resting upon her father's hand. She did not look up.

"Gentlemen of the jury," said the Court, "have you agreed upon a verdict?"

"We have, your Honor," said Mr. Larkspur, holding out the document.

"The clerk will read the verdict," said the Court.

*The clerk took the paper, opened it, and read:*

"We, the jury, find the prisoner guilty of burglary as indicted, and fix the punishment at one year's imprisonment in the state penitentiary."

The prisoner half rose, but his daughter clasped both hands about his arm. He sat down again and his chin dropped on his breast. Stelwyn fancied that he saw the gleam of tears in the daughter's eyes, now uncovered. She was very pale as she leaned forward and whispered earnestly to her father.

"Your Honor, I request that the jury be polled," said Mr. Fensom.

"Gentlemen of the jury," said the Court, "answer as the clerk calls your names. Was this and is this your verdict?"

"Hiram Larkspur," read the clerk.

"This was and is my verdict," answered the old foreman in a low voice.

As the names were being called Stelwyn underwent another struggle, but it was only a brief one. He could not shame himself before the world by a retreat. Louise looked up once and gazed earnestly at him, but he did not see her. His eyes were cast down. When his name was called, the last on the list, he answered clearly and firmly: "This was and is my verdict."

"Gentlemen," said the Judge, "the Court thanks you for your intelligent attention and services in this case. The jury is discharged. Officer, remove your prisoner. This Court is adjourned until ten o'clock to-morrow morning," and Judge Servem withdrew himself hastily into his private office.

The jurors passed out of the court room, and Stelwyn lingered in the shadow of the door. He was more angry and disgusted with himself than he had ever been. He had occasionally played a foolish rôle during his life, but it had always been at his own expense. This time he felt that he had been a fool in earnest, and that the crushing weight of his folly rested upon that fair young girl and her old father.

As the two lawyers came out, chatting pleasantly, as if they had both won their cases, Jack retreated along the dark corridor. Then, as they passed down the stairs, he resumed his post at the door.

*The prisoner and his daughter and Ralph Sconer were*

standing together. The officer approached them and said in a tone that was meant to be kindly:

"Very sorry Miss, but I shall have to ask the prisoner to come with me now. You can see him again in the morning at the jail."

Louise, with one hand in her father's hand and the other resting on his shoulder, said in a voice that quivered but slightly:

"How long will it be, officer, before—" she choked a little and seemed to pause for breath.

"Not until Saturday, probably, Miss," said the officer.

"Father," said the girl, as she took both his hands in hers, "Promise me, dear, that you will not be discouraged. Promise that you will think only of me, as I shall think only of you. This great wrong shall be righted. We will both try to be patient, won't we, dear?" her voice faltered, and she stopped.

"My little girl," said the old man, as he took her in his arms. "I promise you that I will be a man. You have often had to blush for my foolishness, but you know, dear, that I am innocent of this. You shall not be ashamed of the way I bear it."

"That's a dear, brave dada," said the girl, releasing herself and standing erect, with one hand still grasping her father's. "Now, father, it's only good-night. I shall see you in the morning."

"I am ready, officer," said the prisoner, firmly.

Ralph had stood somewhat apart. He approached and said in a somewhat constrained tone: "Mr. Morliss, don't be discouraged. We did the best we could, but fate seemed against us this time. Won't you still count me as your friend?" and he held out his hand.

For an instant the prisoner hesitated. Then he took Ralph's hand.

"You did the best possible, Ralph. I must not be angry with you—Good-night."

The prisoner followed the officer out of the court room.

Louise and Ralph watched until they had disappeared, then, without a word to each other, walked out of the court room and down the stairs together—and Mr. Stelwyn followed them.

On the sidewalk they paused for a moment, and Stelwyn halted in the doorway.

"Let me call a cab and take you home, Louise," said Ralph.

"No, thank you," replied the girl. "Ralph," she continued, "if you wish to do me a favor you will let me go home alone. I beg of you, do not come with me."

"But it is late, Louise, surely—"

"I will not have it," she said, vehemently, stamping her foot. "Please go home and leave me," and she started off briskly.

Ralph hesitated for an instant—then turned in the opposite direction.

"The miserable cad!" said Mr. Stelwyn, between his teeth, and he walked rapidly after Louise.

Ralph went straight to the jail, had an interview with the officer in charge, and left a bill in his hands with instructions to provide the prisoner John Morliss with every comfort and luxury allowable during his stay in the jail.

Jack Stelwyn followed Louise, keeping her constantly in sight but preserving a respectful distance behind her.

She walked rapidly to the corner of Norden Street, and the walls of the penitentiary loomed up dark before her. She paused for an instant, and the overstrained nerves gave way. Turning toward the fence, she leaned against it, and, resting her head on her arms, broke into a convulsive fit of sobbing.

And Jack Stelwyn, two rods behind her, also leaned against the fence, and ground his teeth and cursed himself. For in that afternoon he had had almost his first appreciation of real human suffering, and with the swiftly growing stream of feeling that followed his first regret at his verdict, he felt now that all that suffering had been caused by him alone.

What could he do? His nerves were tingling with the longing to approach her, to try and comfort that poor lonely little girl. It would be no exaggeration to say that at that moment Mr. Stelwyn would have cheerfully sacrificed half his fortune could he have had the last three hours to live over again.

He waited, in an agony little less than that of the girl.

*In a few moments she seemed to recover herself. She looked about hastily, and, seeing Stelwyn's dark figure, turned the corner and walked rapidly toward home.*

Jack slowly followed until he had seen her safely in the house, then he walked back to the city and his bachelor quarters, thinking deeply all the way.

Stelwyn's thinking, when he chose to think, was not idle dreaming, and in this case circumstances had furnished him a powerful motive—to undo a great wrong which he believed he had done—to bring happiness where he felt that he had brought misery.

Did any thought of possible happiness for himself lurk behind that motive? If so it was as yet unacknowledged.

Mrs. Morliss opened the door for Louise. She did not express any surprise at seeing her without her father. As they took their seats at the supper table, she asked :

“Then the trial is over, is it?”

“Yes, it is over. Mother dear we are—alone.” Her voice faltered at the last word, and she went and sat by her mother and took her hand, with a strange yearning for sympathy that she had never felt before.

“For how long, Louise?” asked Mrs. Morliss.

“For one year.”

There was silence for some moments. Then Mrs. Morliss said :

“The sentence is a very light one for such a crime. We must arrange to go away from here as soon as possible, Louise. I have endured all I can. This disgrace is too much.”

“Go away from here? Do you think I would go away where I can never see father?—Mother!”

“He has disgraced himself and us, Louise. We should try to forget him.”

“Mother!” For an instant the girl's eyes blazed. Then she said. “I am very tired, Mother, dear, and so are you. Let us not talk any more.”

The supper was finished, and the work done in silence.

In her own room with the door closed, Louise once more broke down, not so much for her father this time, as for her own utter loneliness. Her weary heart longed for some kind word of sympathy, but there was no one to give it.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE AWAKENING OF THE GENTLEMAN

"Cole," said Stelwyn, as the old servant opened the door, "see if Judge Servem has a telephone, and call him up. Go on, you black rascal, what are you waiting for? You needn't take my coat—I'm going out again."

"Yas, Mar's Jack. Wha's dat name again? Judge Suffin?"

"Get out of the way, blockhead," and Jack strode to the telephone.

He rang up the Judge's residence, and learned that the Judge had just left to attend a musicale at Mrs. Chatterton's.

"By Jove!" said he, as he hung up the receiver. "I forgot all about that thing." He looked at his watch. "Eight o'clock! Cole, run to the corner and tell Jimmy to be round with the coupé in twenty minutes. I'm going to Mrs. Chatterton's musicale."

"Yas, Mas'r Jack. Yoe had yoe dinner, Mas'r Jack?"

"Dinner! Did I say dinner, you scarecrow! Do you know Jimmy? Do you know what a coupé is? Can you remember twenty minutes? Hurry, daddy, and come back and help me dress."

"Yes, Mas'r Jack, dreckly," and the old negro stumped away on his errand.

Stelwyn picked up the telephone book and looked for Presto & Co., Detective Agency—then he threw down the book.

"No," he said. "It won't do for me to telephone. That gives it away. I shall have to go and see them."

In twenty-five minutes, with the assistance of old Colon, who brushed and laid out his clothes, and put in his shirt-studs, Mr. Stelwyn was arrayed in evening attire and speeded away to Mrs. Chatterton's.

*The roar of a piano saluted his ears as the servant opened the door, and he lingered chafing with impatience in the dress-*

ing room until the clamor of the chords was replaced by the clamor of hand-clapping. Then he descended and found the hostess.

"Why, Mr. Stelwyn, I am delighted. I began to fear you had forgotten me. Where have you been, bad boy? You just missed the most lovely impromptu. Professor Brechenschnur's own composition. He plays wonderfully. Such power and expression, and his technique is really marvelous. Come and be presented."

"Now my dear Mrs. Chatterton," said Stelwyn, "please let me off from the professor. Really I tore myself away from important business just to come and pay my respects to you. Don't thrust an old professor at me when I might have a few moments' visit with you."

"Silly boy! And you haven't called on me for four whole weeks. What's the important business, Jack? Come, tell me. Confess. Isn't it an engagement to play billiards at the club?"

"No, indeed, my dear Mrs. Chatterton, it is something very serious, I assure you."

"Why, Jack, you alarm me. Is it of the heart or of the head?"

"Mrs. Chatterton, you know very well that if I allowed business to interfere with the heart, I wouldn't be here with you."

"You rascal! Well, really, Jack, I mustn't spend the evening walking up and down this hall with you, much as I like it. Go in like a good boy now and enjoy the music. Signor Orotundo is going to sing. I know you'll think he's superb. Go find a seat there and talk to some of the girls. They'll all hate me if I keep you out here."

So Jack mingled with the company and chatted carelessly here and there and had just located Judge Servem talking to an old lady in the corner, when a few chords from the piano drove every one to the shelter of a seat, and the distinguished Italian began to cleave the air with his vocal strokes.

Jack endured, and applauded, and suffered the encore, and then, as everyone rose, he spoke to a young man who was leaning idly against the wall.

"Harry, do you know the old party talking with Judge Servem?"

"Sure! That's Nellie Armand's great aunt—a recent importation from abroad. Want to be presented, Jack?"

"Rats! No! Go and remove her, will you, Harry? Take her out to see the paintings. Anything! Get her away from there. I want five minutes' talk with the Judge."

So in a few moments the old lady toddled off on the young man's arm, and Jack quickly made his way to the Judge.

"Hulloa, Stelwyn. Getting a little recreation after your arduous duties in court?"

"Yes; don't I look worn out, Judge? I ought to look so. I'm disturbed about some business matters of my own that need prompt attention. You can get along without me for the rest of the term, can't you?"

"Yes, I guess so, Jack. We seem to have a good supply of jurymen, such as they are. How do you like being locked up with the noble citizen?"

"I rather enjoyed the novelty," said Jack. "What did you think of our verdict, Judge?"

"Do you want a professional opinion, or a personal opinion?"

"Either! Both!"

"Your verdict was according to the law and the evidence. Personally I don't see how you, Jack Stelwyn, could have had the heart to so punish that brave little girl."

"She is a brave little thing—and pretty, too, isn't she?" said Jack, placidly.

"Brave! She never whimpered once—and she stood and defied me. By God, sir," and the old Judge's face flushed, "if I had been on that jury I would have acquitted her father, law or no law."

Jack's heart burned with bitter shame, but he said, lightly:

"Who would have suspected the grave and dignified Judge Servem of such susceptibility? Well, Judge, I must fly to serious business. Thank you for excusing me. Good-night."

After a few moments of good-natured chaffing and flirtation with Mrs. Chatterton and the half-dozen young ladies who surrounded him, Jack escaped from the house.

"Jimmy," he said to the driver, "go to No. 750 Spring Street."

*Stelwyn sent in his card and was ushered into the private office of Presto & Co.—Detective Agency.*

"What can we do for you, Mr. Stelwyn?" said the night officer. "Have you been held up?"

"No," said Jack. "There's nothing serious the matter. Can you give me a good man for a week or more—on a private matter?"

"What line, Mr. Stelwyn?"

"I want him simply to keep tab on a man in this town, shadow him and learn all his habits and resorts and report to me as often as I instruct."

"We have just the man for you—Billy Slick—sharp as a weasel. He's out now, but I expect him in before eleven-thirty."

Jack looked at his watch. "It's now ten forty-five. Send him round to my rooms at twelve o'clock sharp. Tell him not to let any one see him at the door. Don't ring the bell, but tap lightly. I'll hear him."

"All right, Mr. Stelwyn. He'll be there. You can trust Billy. No one ever got the best of that man."

"At twelve o'clock, then. Good-night"—and Jack left the office.

"To the club, Jimmy," he said to the driver.

Mr. Stelwyn had been without his dinner, and the inner man demanded satisfaction for the affront. At the club he devoured a Welsh rarebit and drank a bottle of ale, then drove quickly home.

Old Colon was dismissed in summary fashion, and Jack pulled down the shades, drew the heavy curtains and turned out the hall light.

As the clock struck twelve a faint tapping sounded on the outer door, and the detective was quickly admitted, and guided into the lighted library.

He was a slightly-built man, with a smooth face and the appearance and dress of a very green country lad of perhaps twenty-five years. He held his hat in both hands and stared about the room with an expression of innocent wonder.

"I have heard of you, Mr. Slick," said Jack. "Sit down. We'll talk straight business, if you please."

Instantly the verdancy disappeared. The detective threw his hat behind him, sat down easily, and leaned forward with his keen eyes fixed on Stelwyn's face.

"There is a man in this town named Thomas Sconer," began Stelwyn. "He is in the employ of Coldart & Goolie."

Mr. Slick interrupted: "He is a porter. He testified for the state to-day in the trial of John Morliss for burglary. Morliss openly accused him of the crime. You were on the jury that convicted Morliss, Mr. Stelwyn."

Jack betrayed a little involuntary surprise.

"You anticipate me, Mr. Slick. Were you at the trial?"

"No; but I find it useful to keep track of these things. Please proceed, Mr. Stelwyn."

"I want you to find out all that any man can find out about this Thomas Sconer. What are his habits? Who are his associates? How does he spend his evenings? How does he spend his money, and how much does he spend? Where does he get his money? What is his life? *What are his most secret thoughts?*"

"You think that Sconer stole the ten thousand dollars, and want to prove it. Is that right?"

"I did not ask you to find out my secret thoughts."

"Let us understand each other, Mr. Stelwyn. I can serve you much better if I know your definite aim. Do you wish me to bring about the conviction of Sconer for the crime of which Morliss has been judged guilty?"

"If Sconer is the guilty man; yes."

"Would you prefer to be assured that Sconer is the guilty man?"

"Mr. Slick, I see that we are far from understanding each other. I want no innocent man to suffer. I employ you to ascertain certain facts which you can learn more easily and more correctly than I. I desire you to make reports to me of such *facts* as you can gather. I may require your opinion as to the bearing of those facts. If so, I will ask it. In the meantime, you will please confine yourself to the letter of your instructions—to turn Thomas Sconer inside out—as you have tried to turn me."

Jack stood up, his face somewhat flushed. The detective also rose and said, with a smile:

"You will pardon me, Mr. Stelwyn. I think I now understand the requirements. The instructions shall be followed. When and how would you prefer to have my reports?"

"The first report—to-day is Thursday—say, on Saturday night—here, and at the same hour. After that we will decide on the second."

"Morliss goes to the penitentiary on Saturday."

Stelwyn began to walk nervously up and down the room. The detective watched him.

"Can that be stayed in any way?" asked Jack.

"We can hardly hope to gather much new evidence in so short a time."

"Very well," said Stelwyn, with an effort. "Report at twelve o'clock on Saturday night. You will probably need money. Here is fifty dollars to start with. Use this and as much more as you judge advisable. Learn the facts at any cost. Let me know your expenses and your requirements with each report."

"We can do most anything with money enough, Mr. Stelwyn," remarked the detective, as he pocketed the bills. "I shall try to have some news for you by Saturday night."

"The more *facts* the better," said Stelwyn, and Mr. Slick was quietly guided through the dark hall and dismissed.

"So much for my first detective experience," remarked Jack, as he sat down alone. "I have learned something. That fellow shan't get the better of me again. He knows my every motive."

But he didn't, nor did Jack himself.

At breakfast the next morning, Stelwyn was absent-minded and not very hungry.

"Wy doan yoe eat dat chop, Mas'r Jack?" said Colon. "Nuffin wrong wid dat English mutton chop. Ah picked dat out mahself."

"Cole," said Stelwyn, "how much does it cost you to live?"

"Lawd bress yoe, Mas'r Jack! Ah doan rightly know. Costs a heap o' money dese yere times."

"How much does it cost your wife to live?"

"De missus? She's de mos' extravagantest crittur—foh de Lawd, Mas'r Jack, dat ole woman doan give mah no peace o' mah life. She's alwus wantin' moh money, moh money. Now she 'pears to be clamorin' foh some supuhfloos foolery foh yeastah."

"Well, you old miser, why don't you give her what she wants? Don't I pay you ten times what you're worth, you vagabond?"

"You'm vey kind, Mas'r Jack. Dese is powful hahd times."

"Here, you beggar; give her this ten dollars to buy the *Easter bandana*. I see I get no information from you. Go

on with your work, you lazy dog. Clear off this table, quick," and Stelwyn rose from his slight repast and went into his little office—a room which was seldom visited.

He looked over some accounts, consulted his bank balance, and drew a check, which he put in his pocket. Then he took a pad of paper, and, after some reflection, a half dozen trials, and as many wasted sheets of paper, he succeeded in composing a letter, which he also put in his pocket. Thus fortified, he donned his hat and coat and walked briskly downtown, to the office of his lawyer.

Mr. Garder had been the Stelwyn family lawyer for a longer period than Jack's memory could vouch for. He had possessed the confidence of the father from the time of his settlement in Compos, and he retained the confidence of the son. Jack never made any investment nor took any important step without at least consulting old Mr. Garder. Sometimes the young man, in his youthful impetuosity, which he called modern progressiveness, had refused to follow the conservative counsel of his old adviser, and once or twice he had been punished for his self-confidence. But Jack was no plunger, and, as a rule, his judgment had been justified by results. The old lawyer had learned to regard him with a feeling that was half paternal, and half respectful. He had also learned that when Mr. Jack Stelwyn announced a positive determination, any discussion of the matter was a waste of valuable time.

"Good-morning, Jack," said he, as Stelwyn entered the private office. "Sit down. I see something has gone wrong. Out with it."

"Yes," said Stelwyn. "Things do go wrong in this Land of the Free, sometimes. I want to make a new investment, Mr. Garder. To save your criticism, I will state beforehand that I don't expect any pecuniary return, but have decided to take the risk on other grounds."

The old man smiled slowly.

"Well, Jack," he said, at length, "I trust you will consent to honor me with the name of the fortunate young lady."

Stelwyn colored slightly under the keen look of the old lawyer.

"You are on a cold scent, Mr. Garder," he said. "That fortunate young lady is still without a name, to me. I suspect she is as yet unborn." He paused for a moment, then said, abruptly:

"You bank at the Second National, don't you?"

"Just so," said the lawyer, watching Jack's face with a quiet smile of expectancy.

Stelwyn pulled out some papers from his pocket, and passed them over to the lawyer.

"There," said he, "is a check to your order for \$175. Will you kindly deposit that to your credit. Then draw a check for \$150, payable to your bank. Write a note, advising your bank that you have received a sum of money from out of the city, which is to be paid to Mrs. John Morliss in installments of \$150 per month, of which the enclosed check is the first payment. Instruct the bank to advise Mrs. Morliss at once by a letter worded like the copy in your hand."

Jack settled himself in his chair, and mentally braced himself for a stubborn hold-out.

The lawyer put on his glasses and carefully read and reread the letter. Then he looked over his glasses at Stelwyn, and studied the determined face, and the inscrutable blue eyes that were watching him.

"Of course I will do as you instruct, Mr. Stelwyn," he said. "May I ask you a few ordinary questions—as a friend?"

"Of course—go on," said Jack.

"This Morliss—was on trial yesterday—when you were on the jury?"

Jack stood up and took two or three steps, then faced about, and said, rapidly :

"I may as well tell you the whole thing, Mr. Garder. I was on the jury that convicted Morliss. I have regretted that I voted as I did. I now believe the man was innocent, but I have no grounds to ask for a new trial, or—a pardon. Having done such a fearful injustice, I am trying to undo it—first, as you see, by helping his family."

"His family," said the lawyer. "His wife—and I read something in the paper about a handsome daughter."

"The daughter has nothing whatever to do with it," said Jack, hotly. "The money goes to the mother—the wife, I mean."

"Quite so," said Mr. Garder, with a placid smile. "Very well, Jack. There have been worse investments than this. Your stock is not assessable, even if it doesn't pay dividends. *I will follow out the scheme, and we'll see what the daughter—the wife, I mean—will say.*"

"Say! How can they say anything? They don't know any one in the matter."

"Well! They might say 'Thank you' to the bank. But perhaps not. We'll wait and see."

"You will attend to this to-day, Mr. Garder?"

"Immediately, Mr. Stelwyn."

Jack left the office and walked to the jail. He had not fully determined on his next move. To see the prisoner now might be injurious to the success of his manipulations. He wished to keep his movements entirely secret until he could at least be assured of their final success. He walked past the jail entrance just as Louise was coming out. The young lady gave him one quick, startled look, and hurried on her way.

Jack hesitated for a few moments, then went to his club and tried to interest himself in the magazines. He turned over the pages of one after the other without seeing an article or a picture to attract him.

"These things grow more stupid every month," he growled to himself. "Wish I'd told that detective to report to-night instead of to-morrow night."

He went down to the billiard room and found a man who would accept a discount game with him. Stelwyn was the billiard champion of the club, but he met an ignominous defeat to-day. After an hour of erratic playing, he threw down his cue in disgust and left the club house.

He was growing nervous and irritable. Enforced delay was an unpleasant novelty—in his experience. Heretofore he had never wanted to do anything without being able to go and do it at once. The virtue of patience had grown feeble from the lack of necessity for its cultivation.

He waited and thought for a moment at the club entrance.

"Coldart & Goolie's," he said, to himself. "I'll go and take a look at the place."

Half way down Spring Street he met Mr. Dapper coming along at a lively gait. The little dry-goods clerk stopped and held out his hand.

"Why, good-morning, Mr. Stelwyn. Did you get off, too? I got excused for an hour, and—"

Jack looked him coldly in the face, said "Excuse me," and passed on, leaving Dapper standing with outstretched hand.

Mr. Stelwyn was rarely discourteous to any one, but the sight of Dapper aggravated his present ill-humor.

"Does that duffer think himself my friend because I had the misfortune to be locked up with him!" he said angrily. "Damn it! Misery does acquaint one with strange bedfellows."

As he walked on rapidly he began to realize that he was not playing his game with sufficient poise. His feelings were getting the better of him. When he left the club he had a vague intention of going to Coldart & Goolie's and spending a few hundred dollars in a speculation in sugar, or something else—simply as an excuse for learning the run of the office—seeing the lay of the land, and especially of having an opportunity to study Ralph Sconer. He did not definitely admit the fact, but the fact nevertheless existed, that he had acquired a violent dislike to Mr. Ralph Sconer.

Before he reached the office, however, he felt that it would be unwise for him to be so suddenly interested in investments with Coldart & Goolie. Ralph would recognize him at once, and could not fail to connect his appearance to-day with his jury service of yesterday. It might seriously endanger the success of his plans. Again he was forced to the irritating conviction that he had played all the cards that should be played. He must wait patiently for a counterplay, or else run the risk of disclosing the weakness of his hand.

He did not enter the office, but walked down Sugar Street toward the river. Thomas Sconer was standing in his shirt sleeves at the shipping door, talking with an old farmer, and apparently giving him some directions. Stelwyn passed them quickly, and walked along the river-front to the next street, and so back to his club to lunch.

Louise had passed two hours with her father at the jail. She inquired of the officer in charge if there was anything she could provide to make the prisoner more comfortable, and was informed that a gentleman had already left money to be used for that purpose. From the official's description she easily recognized Ralph, and her heart warmed toward him at this quiet kindness to her father.

The old man was depressed and gloomy. The bitterness of his anger was over, and had given place to a hopeless resignation. "I will go through it all patiently, dear," he said, "for your sake—but I have no more hope of happiness. *This year's disgrace and misery will only serve to introduce*

something still more cruel. There is no more justice in the world. There is no God to help us. There is no human being to care that an old man is foully lied out of his freedom and his place in the world."

"Ralph is still our friend, father," said the girl, with some hesitancy."

"Ralph loves you, Louise—or did love you. How can he love the daughter of a convict? He tried to help me for your sake. He never believed me innocent, and since I told the truth about his father there is a wall between us. I suffer for the crime of his father, and by the same stroke I lose my only friend."

And Louise was silent, for now again she felt the pain of the wound which Ralph's unbelief had given her, and under the sway of that feeling his acts of kindness seemed like insults.

"Father, dear," she said, at last, "we will let them all go. Fair-weather friends should not have the power to hurt us. We have each other, father, and we will not fail each other. You must be brave to suffer for me, and I will be brave to work for you."

"What can you do, little girl, in this world of the unjust?"

"I don't know yet, father, but I shall do something."

And so their suffering made them happier, for it drew them still closer together, and made each more than ever the other's existence.

It was noon when Louise left the jail. She had determined to face the situation bravely, and do everything possible to alleviate it for her father. As she walked she thought calmly of the penitentiary. She knew nothing of the rules of government of such a place. How often could she see her father? Would she be permitted to see him at all? She must learn the worst at once.

She thought of Ralph, and dismissed the thought. She would ask nothing of him.

Then, suddenly, an inspiration came to her. She hesitated for a moment. Why not? It could do no harm at least. She entered the court-house and went quickly up the stairs to Judge Servem's room. Court was dismissed, and she met the Judge coming from his private office. She stopped before him, and said:

"I beg your pardon your Honor. Might I speak with you for a moment?"

The Judge glanced at her with an expression of surprise, and then his face lighted with a kindly look of recognition.

"Ah! Miss Morliss," he said. "Will you walk into the office, please? Kindly be seated. How can I help you?"

"I am sorry to annoy you, Judge," she said, "but I do not know about the prison rules, and I could think of no one else to ask. Can you tell me what is necessary for me to do, so as to obtain permission to visit my father after he is in the penitentiary—and do you know how often I can do so?"

She spoke quietly and with scarcely a trace of hesitation or emotion. The Judge had half feared some outburst of feminine grief—some wild plea for his assistance. He knew that the grief was there, and his heart warmed more than ever toward this brave little woman who so quietly and unflinchingly met and accepted her great sorrow.

"My dear Miss Morliss," he said, courteously, "I am very glad that you came to me about this—for it gives me sincere pleasure to help you. I know the warden very well, and I think he considers himself under some obligations to me. I will give you a note to him, asking him to allow you to visit your father once a week—for two hours at a time—during the term of his imprisonment. That is probably all that it would be proper for him to permit. Would that please you?"

"You are very kind, Judge Servem," she replied. "That is more than I had hoped for."

The Judge turned to his desk and wrote the note and handed it to Louise. She thanked him very earnestly, and he bowed politely and opened the door for her to pass out.

"It is nothing, Miss Morliss," he said. "I heartily wish that circumstances would permit me to be of much greater service to you."

And the girl walked home with a gladdened heart.

## CHAPTER VIII

### SCHEMES OF VARIOUS SORTS

On Saturday morning Mrs. Morliss was alone in the little cottage on Norden Street. Louise had gone to the jail to spend the few remaining hours with her father. Mrs. Morliss, adhering sternly to her angry resolve, had refused to see her husband since his conviction. She had never for a moment doubted his guilt, and the thought that her daughter scorned her feelings and her opinions, still more embittered her toward the unfortunate man whom she regarded as the cause of all her unhappiness.

When she first met John Morliss, more than twenty years ago, she was the acknowledged belle of the little town in which she had been born. There was no lack of suitors for her hand. The sons of wealthy farmers, the young business men, quarreled with each other for her slightest smile of encouragement, or her most careless word of kindness. She was so absolute a queen that she learned to spurn her subjects, to play with their feeling, to ridicule them, to regard them all as far beneath her.

And a young man suddenly came into her life, with a nature so vastly different from these common-place toys of hers that she was startled out of her queenly attitude. He talked to her of things of which she was ignorant. He was the master—she the pupil. He wooed her with all the glowing ardor of an intense idealism. In his words she drank a new intoxicating life. She dreamed of an existence far more glorious than anything within her horizon. She accepted John Morliss—not so much a husband, as a guide to that entrancing future which he had taught her to hope for.

After a year of happiness and undisturbed confidence, she had begun slowly to learn the difference between dreams and deadly facts, between promise and performance. The actual *man was the same as he had ever been*, a dreamer whose *dreams were to him more real than reality*. But the man

of the young girl's dream—a dream inspired by the man himself—slowly faded like other dreams. The wife awoke—and the husband still dreamed.

For the first few years of their life together she had worked earnestly, bravely, and like a true woman to arouse and stimulate the dormant faculties of the man whom she had once worshiped as a superior being—whom she still kept aloft on a pinnacle which required the constant addition of another and another feminine sophistry and excuse to keep it from falling.

Womanlike she strove womanfully to save her ideal, and womanlike she magnified the inevitable fall. The divinity whom she had adored became at once less than a human being whom she could respect, and the very props and stays which she had invented for his support, were suddenly inverted and served to drive him still lower in her esteem.

For fifteen years she had only endured life, with a man for whom she never had any real love.

It is a long distance from worship to contempt, but the path is more and more steeply downward, and the journey is swift, and *Love* will never interpose a resting place.

So through the best of her life she had regarded herself as a martyr—as a woman betrayed and wronged and suffering. Her daughter's devotion to the man that had wronged her added daily drops of bitterness to her cup of sorrow. She loved Louise. She would have been tender and motherly to her daughter, if the daughter had had less of John Morliss in her eyes and in her thoughts.

And on this bright spring morning the wife of the convicted criminal was alone. She sat by the open window, thinking of the past.

The warm, golden sunshine flooded all the room, and the south wind swept in alluring with its fragrant promise. The merry voices of the boys playing marbles on the street came to her with the sunshine and the south wind.

The intense joyous life of spring breathed in the world about her. Mrs. Morliss rose wearily and closed the window.

"Alone!" she said. "But no more to-day than always," and she left the room and the sunshine.

At two o'clock Louise returned. Ralph was with her. Mrs. Morliss had a lunch ready, and was waiting. She felt that she had always been waiting.

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"Ralph, you will sit down with us?" said Louise.

"Yes, Mr. Sconer," said Mrs. Morliss; "you must be tired after all you have done for us. Please take a little lunch before you go. I can't offer you much, but—" (she caught a dangerous gleam from her daughter's eyes, and finished the sentence differently from what she had intended) "it will refresh you a little."

Ralph was glad of any excuse to linger, and so these three sat down together. It was not exactly a triangular warfare. No one of the three was at enmity with either of the other two, but as regarded the great subject, of which all thought and none spoke, their positions were about equi-distant. It was an armed neutrality on the part of each.

The lunch was finished at last, and Louise went with Ralph to the door. The young man hesitated and played absently with the door-handle. His eyes were cast down. The young lady stood erect, self-contained, and a trifle haughty in her bearing.

"Louise," said Ralph, suddenly looking up, "you must forgive me if I refer again to what we spoke of. You must let me help you. What can you do alone? Now, please try to look at matters in a reasonable way. When one meets with unexpected misfortunes, surely friends should be allowed to help. I—I do not ask anything, Louise, except to assist you. You know that you will need help. Won't you let me be the friend? Let me—let me *lend* you what you want for this year. You need feel no obligation to me. I have money to invest. You—you can agree to pay me interest." Ralph's kindly heart and his business point of view were striving painfully together to make an acceptable presentment of his desire to help the girl whom he loved.

The girl saw something of the struggle, and could not be without appreciation of the devotion that was behind the blundering words.

Her eyes softened a little and she said:

"Ralph, you have been very kind to us already." She held out a hand, which Ralph quickly clasped. "Don't think that we shall forget it"—she quickly withdrew her hand—"and don't be angry with me because I will not let you do *more for us* now. There is nothing needed yet, Ralph. I shall try alone. If I fail—why then, perhaps—"

*They had stepped out on the porch.*

"Then," said Ralph, eagerly, "you will let me help you. I want to help you, Louise. You know I would give up everything for you. All that I have tried to do for your father has been for you, and all went well until—" Ralph suddenly stopped, for the girl's face had grown white and rigid.

"Ralph," she said, slowly pointing with her finger, "My father is shut up in that prison for a crime that he never committed. And your father—" she checked herself. "Ralph, don't you see that I cannot accept any more kindness from you—now?"

There was no word spoken for a few moments. Ralph walked to the railing and glanced up and down the street, and stared vacantly at a grocer's wagon in front of the opposite house. The sun seemed very warm and the voices of the boys playing marbles very shrill and unpleasant. He turned and looked half timidly at the young lady.

"Please forgive me, Louise," he said. "If I am thoughtless in my words you know it is because I think of you more than of any words."

"I have nothing to forgive, Ralph. I have much to thank you for."

"You are not angry with me?"

"No; not angry."

"What, then? You are not the same as before?"

The girl suddenly walked to where Ralph stood by the railing.

"It is nothing, Ralph," she said, smiling. "I am a little tired and nervous. Go back to your business, and do not think of us."

"You will not let me help you?"

"We need nothing now, Ralph. Wait and see. Good-by."

"I shall try to help you, someway," said Ralph, and he went slowly down the steps.

Louise watched him for a moment as he walked away, then she hurried upstairs to her father's attic studio.

She dusted all the pictures and rehung them, set the easel with its unfinished painting in the best light—and whistled all the time as she worked.

For two hours she busied herself in arranging and rearranging the half-hundred sketches, studies, finished and *unfinished paintings*.

*At last, very tired, but less nervous, she sat down on the*

seat of the wide dormer window and looked into the street. A blue-coated messenger-boy lounged slowly along the creaking wooden sidewalk that glowed with the sunshine. He became quite interested in the game of marbles, and by a few well-timed remarks succeeded in exciting a lively alteration between two of the players. Having thrown this apple of discord, he turned complacently toward the house, studied the number on the door, and forthwith proceeded to ring the bell and furnish more occasion for disagreement.

Soon the voice of Mrs. Morliss summoned her daughter.

"Read that, Louise," she said, holding out an open letter.

The girl took the letter and read aloud :

"SECOND NATIONAL BANK,  
"Compos, April 3d.

**"MRS. JOHN MORLISS.**

"*Madam* :—We are instructed to advise you that a sum of money has been forwarded to the hands of one of our depositors to be used for your benefit, the same to be payable to your order in installments of \$150 per month. We have received the first deposit of \$150, which is now subject to your check. Subsequent deposits of like amount will be made to your credit in this bank on the first of each month hereafter until further notice to you.

"We are also instructed to advise you that the original depositor of the said sum of money requests that you will carefully refrain from any attempt to ascertain the name of said original depositor. That this deposit is made to your credit on account of an obligation to your husband which neither you nor he will be able to recall, but which the depositor remembers and which he desires, with your permission, to partially meet in this manner.

"The first payment of \$150 will be made to you on demand at this bank.

Very respectfully,

"J. G. JIMSON,  
"Cashier."

Jack had tried to make his communication very brief and banklike, but he could not keep himself from that bit of explanation. It was hard work for him to exclude his personality even as much as he had done.

"It seems we have some friends, after all," said Mrs. Morliss.

*Louise was twisting the letter around her finger.*

"What would you do about this, mother?" she asked.

"Do! I shall go and draw the money. Fortunately we are relieved from the necessity of thanking anyone."

"Of course you know where this money comes from?"

"No, I do not; and the letter requests me not to know. Louise, don't be romantic and foolish. If you knew all the suffering I brought on myself by romance you would keep such notions out of your head."

"I cannot accept any help from Ralph, mother, not even when he offers it in this courteous way."

"You are very silly, child. You don't know at all that Ralph has anything to do with this. And if he has, it would be unkind of you to let him know that you suspect it."

"I shall not mention it to Ralph. I will answer this letter to the bank—that's all."

"And decline to accept the money?"

"Most certainly."

"You are a very foolish, thoughtless girl, Louise. I have no patience with you. You deliberately turn your back on the most unexpected good fortune. Such offers will not be repeated, let me tell you."

"I hope not. I am not frightened, mother. I have a little money saved, and I shall go to work. With a little experience I can make myself useful in an office."

"Yes; perhaps you had better apply for your father's position. The burglar's daughter would be a very desirable successor to the burglar," and with this sarcastic remark Mrs. Morliss left the room, muttering to herself as she went.

Louise sat thinking for some time, then she rose quickly and went to her desk to answer the letter.

At twelve o'clock on this Saturday night a light tap at Mr. Stelwyn's door announced the arrival of the detective. Jack opened the door and the man followed him quickly into the library, and then Mr. Stelwyn stood gazing in astonishment at an old gray-bearded farmer with a deep scar extending diagonally across his forehead.

"Who the devil are you?"

"Don't be alarmed, Mr. Stelwyn," said Slick. "I was in a cavalry regiment during the war, and I got this wound (he touched his forehead) in a skirmish near Chattanooga."

"Great heaven, man," said Jack, "you are a wonder. Sit down and tell me what you have learned."

"First, Mr. Stelwyn," said the detective, seating himself,

"let me advise you to keep away from my field. You passed Coldart & Goolie's yesterday just as I was making a valuable acquaintance. Mr. Sconer looked after you with somewhat of distrust."

"I saw him," said Jack; "but I never suspected the name of his companion."

"The disguise is reasonably clever," said Slick, with a complacent smile. "My name is Martin Greenfield, and I am here in the city for a little innocent amusement and recreation. Mr. Thomas Sconer has kindly taken me under his protection, and is showing me the town by gas-light. I pay the bills, and as a consequence we are already excellent friends. We got as drunk as possible together to-night after he had won a hundred dollars at a faro bank on my stake. But he was not too drunk to try clumsily to pick my pocket while he thought me asleep. He escorted me to my hotel and left me there fifteen minutes ago. We parted with fraternal embraces, and a solemn agreement to renew our festivities to-morrow morning. To-morrow being Sunday, Mr. Sconer is at liberty to give me his entire time."

"Then, in brief, you have already learned that Thomas Sconer is a gambler and a pick-pocket. I congratulate you, Mr. Slick. Has he told you anything about his past life?"

"A great deal; but one can hardly expect any truth in his statements to an old hayseed, whom he hopes to despoil to the last dollar. He regaled me last night with a long account of his former wealth, and how he had lost it all in a tremendous run of ill-luck on the Board of Trade—and he wound up by borrowing five dollars from me."

"What about his associates?"

"He seems to be well known to all the tough saloon-keepers, all the faro-banks, and most of the crowd that frequent such places. But through the working hours at Coldart & Goolie's he is a sober, industrious porter, and while he is not popular with his fellow-workmen, it is only because he is somewhat surly and uncommunicative. No one has anything worse to say of him, and his superiors regard him as one of their most reliable men."

"Do his employers—does his son, Ralph Sconer—suspect how he spends his evenings?"

*"Probably not. I learn that he is almost invariably in his room before midnight, and that his son is usually awake and waiting for him."*

Jack got up and walked back and forth, smoking rapidly, as was his habit when in deep thought.

"Mr. Slick," he said, suddenly, "in your opinion, is there any possible collusion between the son and the father in these irregular methods of getting money?"

"Do you wish me to shadow the son, also, Mr. Stelwyn?"

"Not at all!" said Jack, quickly. "I merely asked for your judgment, based on such observation as you have made."

"Then I say, very positively—No! Please remember, Mr. Stelwyn, that my line of business has afforded me frequent opportunities of seeing and noticing Thomas Sconer before I had the honor of being employed by you. I felt that I knew the man pretty thoroughly. Of his son, I have known but little, and that little has been most highly flattering to the young man. In my judgment, Ralph Sconer has no suspicion of the true character of his father."

Jack sat down and threw his cigarette from him, irritably.

"You say you knew all about this Thomas Sconer. Why did you not tell me so at our first interview?"

"Pardon me, Mr. Stelwyn. Will you kindly remember that you silenced me at that interview by ordering me to hold to the letter of my instructions, and to keep my advice until asked for?"

"That is so!" said Jack; "and I have been losing time. Mr. Slick, I should have placed more confidence in your experience."

Mr. Slick bowed gravely.

"You have known this man Sconer for some time," continued Stelwyn. "Have you ever known him to commit an actual crime?"

"As I told you, Mr. Stelwyn," said the detective, "my observation of the man has been merely incidental. I have never had occasion to watch him particularly until now."

"Mr. Slick, do you personally think that Sconer committed that burglary?"

The detective smiled slowly.

"Mr. Stelwyn," he said, "I have no more evidence than you have, as yet. I know that the man is capable of that burglary, or of any other crime, or of any meanness, if he is the gainer, and reasonably sure of safety."

"And I know that he committed the burglary," said

Stelwyn, fiercely. "And, by God, we will prove it on him yet!"

He was silent for a moment, and then said:

"Continue your work, Mr. Slick. I am much pleased at your report. We are nearing our mark, I think. Report to me again on Monday night."

"You asked for a statement of account with each report, Mr. Stelwyn," said the detective, and he handed out a card.

Jack glanced at the figures carelessly, then drew out his pocket-book.

"Here is another fifty, Mr. Slick. Don't spare the money. Get evidence at any cost."

The detective bowed and rose to go. The appearance of the old farmer was so strangely out of keeping with his speech and manner that Stelwyn laughed.

"We must have a drink on that costume of yours, Slick," he said.

"Thank you, Mr. Stelwyn; I never drink except in the line of professional duty."

"True! I forgot your business requirements."

"Mr. Stelwyn," the detective turned as he reached the library door, "if expense is of no importance to you in this matter, I feel reasonably sure that for a certain sum of money I can secure a written and signed confession from Thomas Sconer that he was himself guilty of the burglary for which Morliss was convicted."

"You mean without any further evidence?"

"I mean, now, as matters stand at present."

"That is," said Jack, slowly, "you think that whether guilty or innocent, the man would *sell* that statement over his signature."

"Exactly."

"I fail to see how such a statement could benefit me, Mr. Slick. I will spend any money to run down the facts in this case, but I will not knowingly pay one dollar to any man, least of all to Thomas Sconer, for false evidence or bogus confessions. Let that be perfectly clear."

"I merely suggested such a possibility, Mr. Stelwyn."

"We will not follow that line, Mr. Slick. Good-night."

Jack sat down once more and pondered. After all, was *he not working on the wrong tack?* Of what use would *it be to prove that Sconer was a gambler, a pick-pocket, a swindler, or any other sort of a criminal unless he could be*

connected with this specific crime? Stelwyn was now himself fully convinced of Sconer's guilt, but in the meantime Morliss was in the penitentiary, and nothing short of the conviction of another man for the same crime, could produce a reversal of the judgment against Morliss. What evidence could ever be obtained sufficient to convict Sconer unless it were his own confession?

And how could such a confession be secured except by means which would greatly weaken if not destroy its value?

These questions weighed heavily upon Mr. Stelwyn's mind, and when at three o'clock he went to bed, he was profoundly discouraged.

At Sunday morning breakfast he was so irritable and so abusive to Colon, that the old servant's eyes sparkled with satisfaction. For Jack had been long accustomed to firing off all loads of vexed temper at the impenetrable person of his faithful retainer, and then salving the wounds which he fancied he had given, by plentiful applications of greenbacks and coin. So Colon's happiness was usually in direct proportion to his master's irritability. He realized that great suffering was the harbinger of great reward.

Jack's Sunday was passed by a drive into the country. He went alone, even declining the companionship of Jimmy, his general horseman, who usually sat in dignified state beside him, when Jack chose to exercise his trotters. The trotters were well speeded on this Sunday, but they had easy breathing both in going and returning along Norden Street and past the penitentiary. Stelwyn was becoming haunted by the vision of a very pretty face with dark eyes, shaded by long lashes. He had seen those eyes blaze with courage and defiance, and he had also seen them full of deep, earnest entreaty. He wondered what they would be like when other emotions looked through them.

The Sunday and the drive brought him no satisfaction beyond the physical refreshment of his swift rush through the clear spring air.

## CHAPTER IX

### SOME FAILURES AND SOME SUCCESSES

Monday morning had new disappointments for Jack Stelwyn.

He expected by this time to receive news from his latest investment, his letter about the "original depositor." He carefully recalled the wording of that letter as he munched an early breakfast, and wished that this phrase or that sentence had been differently turned. But on the whole he considered it a neat composition, and as he swore very mildly at Colon his conscience assessed him only one dollar. He was in excellent spirits as he started for the lawyer's office, but the old negro servant was perplexed.

"Sum'f'n shoely wrong wid Mas'r Jack," he said as he looked sadly at the silver dollar. "Dese yere contributions is too irreglar foh good health. Yoe got to keep an eye on dat chile, ole Cole."

"Well, Mr. Garder," said Jack, as he entered the office; "give an account of your stewardship. What of the talent that I gave you in trust?"

"Sit down, young man, sit down," said the lawyer. "You come in here like a whirlwind before I have half opened my mail. Let me see," he looked over the assortment of letters. "There is nothing here of any interest to you. No returns yet, Jack."

"Sure there's nothing there from the bank? There must be," said Stelwyn. "Did you attend to that matter on Friday?"

"On Friday morning, my dear sir, and to-day is Monday. You didn't make your letter of advice so fiery as you are this morning. There's no hot young blood in bank management, as a rule, Jack. Just be patient for a few days and we *may hear something.*"

"*Patient!*" said Stelwyn very impatiently. "I am patient, but I want to know what I'm doing, and I want to know it

now. Mr. Garder, please write a note to the cashier and send it over to the bank. He must have an answer there. What's the use of waiting for their old-fashioned routine? When I speculate I want to know the turn of the market mighty quick."

"Humph," grunted the old lawyer. "It's a queer market. It seems to have turned you wrong side up. I'll send over, Jack. Do you think you can wait till a boy gets there and back, or do you want me to take you over and introduce you?"

"Oh! write your note and don't waste time in talking about it. I'll come back in half an hour," and Jack rushed out and took a rapid walk around a dozen blocks and so back to the office.

"Here, Mr. Speculator," said the lawyer grimly, handing him a letter. "Take back the stock that thou gavest."

"Don't try to be funny, Garder," said Jack, with a smile; but his heart sank as he read the letter.

"MR. J. G. JIMSON, CASHIER.

"*Dear Sir:* Will you please write to our anonymous friend that my mother and I thank him sincerely for his very kind and unexpected offer of assistance. We hope that he will not feel less friendly because we think it best to decline his generous kindness.

"Please write also that the unknown obligation to which he refers is certainly not an obligation to my mother nor to me.

Yours very respectfully,  
"LOUISE MORLISS."

Louise had felt sure that this brief note would be sent to Ralph, and thinking that he would not suspect her knowledge of his connection with the matter she could not refrain from the truly feminine thrust of the last sentence. She wished it to strike home, but she would not have wished Ralph to know that she had aimed it at him.

That thrust went very wide of its intended aim, but it none the less struck home. Stelwyn received and felt its full force.

Disappointment at the result of his efforts and renewed and deepened shame at his fancied injustice to Morliss, suddenly turned to anger at the old lawyer.

"Garder, you must have betrayed me," he said, fiercely.

"Read that last sentence. She knows who it is that has done her father a wrong. She knows that such an obligation cannot be repaid by any offers of assistance to her. Garder, how did she know it? Tell me that," and Jack rose with wrathful face, and his blue eyes demanded a speedy answer.

The old lawyer leaned back in his chair, and looked at Stelwyn with a quizzical smile.

"Well!" said Jack angrily.

"Well!" said Garder placidly.

"Did you in any way intimate to the bank or to anyone that I was behind this matter?"

"No!" still with the same quiet smile.

"Then how the devil did she find it out?"

"Jack Stelwyn," said the old man, sitting up slowly, "you are more of a boy than you have been within fifteen years. Read your precious letter again. Don't flatter yourself that the girl knows or thinks anything about you. Don't you see that that hot shot is fired at some one else, someone whom she does know! Where is your shrewdness, Mr. Unsuccessful Speculator?"

Stelwyn sat down and read the letter again.

"You may be right, Mr. Garder," he said. "Perhaps she does not suspect me. But if not, who is the man?"

"My dear Jack," said the lawyer, shrugging his shoulders, "you go too fast for me. How am I to decipher this young woman's mysterious communications? She may suspect some rich old relative that once kicked her father or did some other obnoxious deed."

Jack sat thinking with the letter in his hand. He got up, lighted a cigarette absently, and began to walk up and down the small office, blowing out clouds of smoke.

"Stelwyn, for Heaven's sake, come to the point at once," said Mr. Garder, as he rose and opened the window. "I can stand anything but that vile cigarette. Do you think I'm a woodchuck, to be smoked out of my hole? I won't have it, Jack, I —" a fit of coughing interrupted the old man.

"Garder," said Stelwyn suddenly, still puffing furiously and apparently unmindful of the lawyer's discomfort, "I have it. Investment No. 1 has failed. We'll try investment No. 2. Give me that block of paper. Oh, well, I'll throw away the cigarette. Here," and he sat down and wrote, and *read aloud as he wrote.*

"Wanted—In a lawyer's office, a young lady of education, to keep books, copy papers, etc. A good salary will be paid to the right person. Address No. —. They will add the box numbers at the different papers. Put that Ad. in all the dailies, will you, Garder?"

"No, I will not," said the lawyer, blinking over his spectacles.

"Yes, you will, you will, *you will*, Garder. You know you will. Now, come old man, don't be pig-headed. Do it as a favor to me."

"But my dear Jack, I —."

"That's all right—I know. But you do it all the same."

"But I don't want any young woman bothering about my office. I would not have one if she paid me for the privilege."

"You don't know what you want, Garder. I'll bet you couldn't tell me now how much you owe me. Your accounts are all tangled up. You know they are. You need some one here to keep track of your business—and, old man, you must have the right one. Remember, I pay the salary, and you get the assistance."

"Oho! Mr. Speedy. You pay the salary and I get the assistance. Better say, you get the assistance and I pay for it in untold annoyances. What do you take me for, young man?—Jack!" The old man suddenly became grave and stern. "If I did not know you to be a gentleman to the heart's center, I should kick you."

The blood rushed quickly to Stelwyn's face. He stood up, hesitated, then walked slowly around the table and stood looking straight into the searching eyes of the lawyer.

"Mr. Garder," he said, "you were my father's best adviser and you have been a father to me in many ways. As such you will always have a freedom of speech which I allow to no other man. If I ask you to do this thing it is because I know that you know me."

And the old man, still looking keenly into the young man's eyes, presently held out his hand and said:

"I will do it for you, Jack."

"Thank you, Mr. Garder," and the hand-clasp that followed meant mutual confidence and respect.

In a few moments it was arranged that an advertisement such as Stelwyn had written, should appear in the daily

papers of the next morning, and that if an answer was received from Louise Morliss she was to be engaged by Mr. Garder at a salary of \$75 per month.

"That's a good deal, Jack, for a girl that knows nothing of business,—eh?"

"Well, if she knows nothing of business, she knows nothing of salaries, Garder, so she will be the less likely to suspect."

The two conspirators parted, and the young conspirator said to himself, as he left the office: "Garder is a stanch old friend. I like him for his plain talk." And the old conspirator said as he wiped his glasses—"Jack never looked so like his father as he did when he tried to crush me. The boy is all right. He has the true stuff in him."

Jack had carefully filed Louise's letter in his pocket-book. Let the rest of this day pass with brief comment.

Stelwyn is painfully busy in an effort to kill time. Ralph is busy in his office, and at odd moments busy with thoughts of how to help Louise. Mrs. Morliss is busy with household cares and gloomy thoughts. Louise is looking through the "Want" columns of the papers, and waiting for her first visit to the penitentiary.

John Morliss is also busy. With shorn head and shaven face, and the damning stripes about him, the old dreamer is still busily dreaming as he works, but his dream is no longer a dream of fame or of success in his art. It is only a dream of freedom.

So our friends are busy in their individual ways, but the man whose business is of importance is the midnight Mr. Slick.

He is prompt as usual, and enters the library quickly with the repressed manner of a man who has news, and who wants to be suspected of it from his affection of not having any. He is no longer the old farmer, but plain Mr. Slick in plain every day garments.

"Well, Slick," said Stelwyn, "you have done something?"

"Not very much, Mr. Stelwyn. I have this."

He held out a card which Jack took and examined. It was a business card of the firm of Coldart & Goolie. On the back of the card were four numbers in pencil, nearly obliterated. Jack made out 77-48-15-85. The card was very dirty.

*As he looked vaguely from the card to the detective, the*

latter presented three letters, written with ink, and a memorandum paper in pencil. The letters were business letters from the firm of Coldart & Goolie and signed, "Ralph Sconer." The pencil memorandum was a note to the shipping clerk giving a list of weights, with request to recheck them, and was also signed "Ralph Sconer."

"Mr. Stelwyn," said the detective, "please compare the figures in those three letters and in that pencil memorandum, with the figures on the back of the card."

Stelwyn stepped to the light and carefully studied the papers. After a few moments he said:

"The figures on the card were undoubtedly made by the man who made the figures in these four letters, Ralph Sconer."

"I think there is no doubt of it," said Mr. Slick.

"Well, but what is the card?" said Jack.

"The numbers on that card were the numbers of the combination on the vault door in Coldart & Goolie's office until the combination was changed on February 16th."

"What!" said Jack. "How did you learn that?"

"By a very simple process. I went to the office of the company who put in the vault door, saw my friend the manager, and asked him to give me the record of his figures for the combination before the last change was made. Here it is. You will see that it tallies with the figures on the card."

"Exactly," said Stelwyn eagerly, as he compared the two papers. "Now, Slick"—he leaned forward expectantly—"where did you get the card?"

The detective smiled complacently, and waited as one who has something too sweet to part with hastily.

"Mr. Stelwyn," he said at length, "I extracted that card from the recesses of the inside pocket of a vest worn by one Thomas Sconer."

"By Jove, Slick, you are a trump. Let's get this together," said Jack hurriedly. "Ralph Sconer puts down the numbers of the combination on a card. The vault is opened by the combination and the money stolen. This card, with the combination, is found in Thomas Sconer's pocket. He has stolen it from his son. Mr. Morliss says that he caught Sconer with the money. Sconer is proved to be a gambler and a pick-pocket. The case is plain as can be. Slick, let's get out a warrant for Sconer at once."

The detective had listened quietly to Jack's rapid utterances.

"Mr. Stelwyn," he said slowly, "pardon me if I venture to advise you not to be too hasty. We are on the road to a case but we have no case as yet sufficient to reverse a judgment rendered."

"Damn the judgment rendered! It was unjust. We have the right man now."

"Yes, I think we have the right man, but we must get much more evidence. What we have doesn't weigh a feather with that against Morliss. If this card could have been shown at the trial of Morliss, things might have gone differently."

"Don't talk about that trial or how it might have gone," said Stelwyn angrily. "The question is what to do now?"

"The thing to do now is to work quietly until we have secured all we need," answered Slick. "If we go before the public at all we must go with an overwhelming majority, or else"—the detective shrugged his shoulders—"Mr. Stelwyn and Mr. William Slick, the well-known detective, will be the laughing-stock of the community. I will say to you very frankly, Mr. Stelwyn, that if you insist upon forcing the case now, I shall wash my hands of it. My reputation must not suffer by a failure due to half-cocking."

"I suppose you are right, Slick," said Stelwyn more quietly, "but it grinds me to wait, with a finger on the trigger. Tell me how you captured the card."

"By the gentle art of touching—the same that Sconer tried on me. After a day of carousal yesterday, I had him in my room at the hotel. I had given up the attempt to get him naturally drunk, so was forced to use artificial means. In his fourth glass of whisky I secreted a little harmless somnolence. He took it kindly, and after a careful investigation of everything in each of his numerous pockets, I selected the card as the only thing of interest. When he awoke he discovered me snoring in my chair. Of course he again attempted to go through me, and of course his clumsiness at once aroused me. We agreed that we had both been pretty drunk, but he was sure he hadn't been asleep, and I was far too drunk to contradict him. Mr. Martin Greenfield was finally sobered up enough to remember that he must go back to the farm for a few weeks to attend to the spring work, and he promised effusively to look up his dear friend

Mr. Thomas Sconer as soon as he could manage to get back. The game of faro has vast possibilities to the rural mind of Mr. Greenfield, and he knows no better guide than Mr. Sconer. The old farmer left his hotel this morning."

"Do you mean to say that you are going to abandon this matter for two or three weeks, Slick?" said Jack.

"Far from it, Mr. Stelwyn, but one mustn't play the same rôle too long. Mr. Greenfield has had his little outing and he has something to show for it. Let another man have a chance. Mr. Stelwyn," continued the detective, as he rose to go, "I must request your patience now for some days. The line I intend to follow will require time, and there will probably be nothing to report before—say Friday night."

"What do you propose to do, Slick?"

"I would much prefer, Mr. Stelwyn, to have your confidence without going into details at present. Certain contingencies may modify my plans. Will you allow me to report in full on Friday night?"

"You certainly have my confidence and my thanks, Mr. Slick. Use your own judgment. If you should be able to report something before Friday, you will find me waiting at twelve o'clock on any night."

"Thank you, Mr. Stelwyn, but don't expect me until Friday."

After the detective had gone, Jack sat down at his desk and prepared a careful statement of the facts of the securing of the card and the identification of the combination numbers, and locked up all the papers together in a drawer of his desk.

"Slick is right," he said. "We mustn't endanger the ground we have gained. But patience seems the hardest virtue to acquire."

## CHAPTER X

### AN INDEPENDENT YOUNG WOMAN

Louise had resolutely refused Ralph Sconer's offers of assistance, both the direct and the indirect—the offer which he tendered in person and the offer which, as she supposed, he had presented anonymously, through the bank. The dominant motive of her thought was always her love for her father, a love which had grown from infancy. That inheritance from her father, the idealistic point of view, had gradually drawn her more and more toward the father as toward a comrade, and more and more away from the mother as from one who seemed unable or unwilling to understand her feelings.

The first love of the child for the loving father who had always a fairy story or an oft-repeated lullaby—to whom she learned to run for safety and protection after childish sins, sure of pardon and defense—had grown to the love of the young girl for a father who was never angry nor impatient with her, whose companionship and friendship were her dearest happiness. And in later years the developed woman loved the old father with a developed love which had all of filial and somewhat of maternal in its depths.

The thing which touched her father touched her with increased intensity. His prosperities or adversities affected her woman's nature as they could not affect even his own—because to her they were magnified by her love.

So it was inevitable that, while she liked Ralph and did not fail to appreciate his kind feeling toward her, his ill-concealed distrust of her father far outweighed all his merits and forced her to regard him as the last person to whom she was willing to feel indebted.

With the intense and cheerful courage of a heroine of romance she had determined to brave the world, to defy the *infamy of her father's unmerited disgrace*, and to earn a *living for herself and her mother, here in the very town*

which had so recently commented with careless interest over her appearance in court, an interest which vanished with the morning paper and the morning coffee.

How long that heroic courage might have endured under adverse circumstances must be left to the judgment of her acquaintances. The circumstances in this case were greatly in her favor.

From the "Want" columns of the papers she industriously selected a half-dozen possibilities, and replied to the advertisements briefly and frankly, that she had no experience, but she felt that her education was fairly good and that with a little introduction to the work she could make herself useful. And she signed her name with a feeling of defiant pride—"Louise Morliss."

Having duly posted these six applications she felt that she was far on the road to an independent livelihood, and she hugged the thought of her father's pleasure when she should tell him that she would be beyond the possibility of want.

Wednesday was the day of her first visit to the penitentiary, and Mrs. Morliss said nothing as her daughter made ready to go out after breakfast. She knew the errand and she knew the uselessness of discussing it. As Louise was about to leave the house her mother asked:

"Will you be home to lunch?"

"Yes, mother. I can only stay two hours," said the girl. Then she came back and kissed her mother.

"Have you no message to send, mother?" she asked.

"No, child, I don't know anyone that you are going to see."

When Louise was gone, Mrs. Morliss sat down and cried quietly for a little time, then went silently and doggedly about her household duties.

A ring at the door-bell announced Ralph Sconer.

"Louise has gone out, Mr. Sconer," said Mrs. Morliss.

"Yes, I know," said Ralph smiling in a constrained manner. "That's the reason I came this morning. I want to see you, Mrs. Morliss."

"To see me! Come in then, Ralph."

"Mrs. Morliss," said Ralph, nervously, as he sat down, "I came to ask you to help me. I—I want to be of some assistance to Louise, but she will not let me—no matter how I try. I have thought of several ways but they all seem failures."

"Louise is a very strange girl, Ralph. I cannot under-

stand her. "Surely," Mrs. Morliss continued with some bitterness, "a mother should know her own daughter, but I confess I am not half acquainted with Louise. It may be my fault, but I don't seem able to gain her confidence. I know she is unwilling to accept any help from you, but she does not tell me why."

Ralph knew the reason and he knew that Mrs. Morliss knew the reason, but it was not a reason that either cared to discuss.

It was perhaps noticeable that Mrs. Morliss and Ralph talked of helping Louise when they both meant helping the Morliss family. Louise had long been tacitly recognized as the head of that family.

"Mrs. Morliss," said Ralph, after a somewhat embarrassing silence, "I think you can help me if you are willing. If I leave some money with you, can't you persuade Louise that it is money that you—well, some you have been saving for a rainy day—and get her to use it, without letting her know that I have anything to do with it? Will you do that, Mrs. Morliss?"

"You are very kind, Ralph. Louise does not deserve such generosity after the haughty way in which she has treated you."

"I can never be angry with her, Mrs. Morliss, no matter how she treats me—and—you see, Mrs. Morliss, we have all been friends so long that it hurts me to be shut out from the chief office of a friend. Here is a little money, Mrs. Morliss, a hundred dollars. Won't you please take it and get Louise to use it—not from me, but from you? I think you can manage it. I don't want the credit of the thing. I only want her to have the help. And," Ralph continued after a moment—"if she will not take it—won't you please use it for—the family?"

"I thank you for her, Ralph," said Mrs. Morliss, as she took the roll of bills which Ralph held out. "You are the only friend we have had in this misfortune. If I can persuade Louise to use your money, for herself, I will gladly do so. She has some very strange notions and I have given up trying to change them. If she will not have it she will not—and in that case I shall return it to you."

"Thank you, Mrs. Morliss," said Ralph more cheerfully, *as he rose to go.* "I know you can make it seem right to her

if she does not suspect me," and with a hasty good-morning Ralph went back to his office.

"A straightforward, kind-hearted, honest young man," said Mrs. Morliss. "I wish Louise could appreciate his practical kindness. She will learn, she will learn some day, as I have learned," and the disappointed wife and mother sighed deeply and sought her relief in active duties, as she had been wont to do for many years.

Louise returned at twelve o'clock. She longed to sit down and talk with her mother, to tell her of all she had seen at the penitentiary, of her father's unhappiness and depression, the hardships of his prison life, her own bitter grief and anxiety. Perhaps the mother would have softened if Louise had had the heart to try her.

But the mother felt, and showed in her manner that she felt, that her daughter did not wish to confide in her, and the daughter's grief was too deep and too sacred to be poured into unsympathetic ears.

"Is there any mail for me, mother?"

"Yes, one letter, I believe. It is there in the hall."

Louise found and opened the letter. It was from Mr. Garder and read:

"From your answer to my advertisement, I think you may be the assistant whom I require. Will you please call at my office as early as convenient."

In spite of her sorrows the girl's youthful spirits rose at this promise of success.

"Mother," she cried, "this is in answer to one of my applications, from a lawyer, a Mr. Garder. He wants me to call."

"Be careful what you do, Louise. You know very little of the world."

"Oh, but I'm going to learn, mother, dear. Never fear for me. I'm going to earn a living now. I shall call on Mr. Garder to-morrow."

"Louise," said Mrs. Morliss, "I know you will have your way, but, it seems too bad for you to work in an office. You have no idea what drudgery and vexation it will be to you. Everything you do will go wrong, and men in business haven't time to make allowances or even to be polite. Your high spirit will not stand it a week."

"My high spirit will have to stand it, mother."

"But it seems so foolish, Louise. You know it isn't necessary yet. You have some money and I have some."

"Yes, but our little won't last long, and I'm a business woman now. We must have some money ahead."

"Louise, I have a hundred dollars."

"A hundred dollars! Mother, you don't mean it."

"Yes, I do," said Mrs. Morliss, with a slight nervousness. "You never thought your mother was so economical, did you?"

"No," said the girl, slowly. She was thinking.

"And now," continued Mrs. Morliss, "I want to turn it over to you to put with your own savings. We can get along for a little while, you see, without your going to work."

She held out the roll of bills and Louise took it daintily between her thumb and forefinger. For an instant she held it, at arm's length, then slowly brought it near her face and sniffed at it with a grave air of suspicion.

"It hasn't the right smell for me, mother," she said laughing, and shaking her head. "You keep it and use it yourself."

"You are dreadfully provoking sometimes, Louise," said the mother, with half-affected anger; "why do you object to taking money from me?"

"Mother, dear," said the girl, "you may be a great financier, but you mustn't try to fool a business woman like your daughter."

Mrs. Morliss felt that her little scheme, so carefully planned, was seen through at a glance, and she took the money with a somewhat crestfallen air. Louise watched her with laughing eyes.

"We shall get along, mother," said the girl as she rose. "Let us not accept any assistance of that sort yet," and she went to her room.

Poor Ralph was again defeated.

In the evening the mother and daughter sat together in the front room of the cottage. Louise on one side of the table and its befrilled lamp was ostensibly interested in the evening paper—in reality, thinking of her new enterprise and the coming interview with the lawyer who had asked her to call.

Mrs. Morliss was busy with some sewing, and more busy with thinking of Louise and Ralph. To her mind no possibility seemed more grateful than her daughter's acceptance of Ralph's devoted love. She contrasted the energetic, hon-

est business man who sought her daughter's hand, with the impractical—and, to her, unscrupulous—man who had won her own, and she longed to save Louise from a future as unhappy as her own past.

Presently she looked up from her work, and said:  
"Louise, don't you like Ralph Sconer?"

And Louise, suddenly awakened from dreams of duties in a lawyer's office, and recalling recent circumstances, answered with an unnatural indifference:

"Yes, mother, I like Ralph. Why?"

"Don't you think him the best friend we have?"

Louise shaded her eyes for a moment with the newspaper.  
"Best or—worst, mother, he seems to be the only friend we have."

"Louise, don't you think you sometimes treat him unkindly?"

The girl reflected for a few minutes and absently folded the newspaper into a dunce cap and twirled it on the end of a paper-knife.

"No, mother, I don't think I'm unkind to Ralph. I think he's unkind to himself. He—" she poised the cap and looked at it contemplatively, then flung it from her. "Well, mother," her eyes had a little quick gleam, "he's foolish enough to waste his kindness where it isn't appreciated—that's all!"

Of course this was cruelly unkind to Ralph after all he had done and tried to do, but it was also cruelly true from Louise's feminine point of view.

Mrs. Morliss sewed diligently for some time without speaking.

There was a well established and fully recognized wall of difference between these two. They talked across the wall, but the wall was higher than their hearts.

Of course such a wall between mother and daughter has always a gate, and the latch-string hangs out on both sides of the gate, but the question is usually, "Which built the wall?" and the evasive answer, "Let the one that built the wall open the gate from her side."

Gates and latches and hearts grow rusty from disuse or neglect.

Louise, a trifle ashamed of her petulant frankness, picked up the newspaper and slowly restored it to its wonted shape.

"Mother," she said, "I don't like to seem unkind to Ralph. I know he wants to help us. But there are reasons," she continued, with a quick, nervous twist of the paper, "and Ralph knows the reasons, too, why I *will not* let him help me. He should know better than to think of such a thing."

Mrs. Morliss looked across the wall and said:

"Louise, I don't understand you. I had always hoped you would be fond of Ralph Sconer. He is certainly a man whom any girl might be proud of."

"I shall never be proud of any man, mother, except of one, my father."

They would not look for the gate. They piled stones on top of the wall.

Mrs. Morliss grew cold and hostile at once.

"I see I must give it up again, Louise," she said. "Don't say that I haven't tried. Why must you insult me for trying?"

The wall was up now beyond the sight-line.

"I will not insult you any more, mother," said the girl haughtily and she went to her own room.

Every little unpleasantness of this sort had a permanent effect upon these two. It added to the mother's bitter feeling against her husband. She felt it to be a blow at her struck by that husband through her daughter. It drove Louise still more rapidly along the path of devotion to her father, and that path led away from the mother.

Louise and her father were together in spirit and thought, and each was a comfort to the other. Mrs. Morliss, in her lonely place, was forced to see her daughter, the only love of her cold nature, drawn more and more from her to the man whom she now distinctly hated.

In the meantime Ralph was placidly congratulating himself upon having made a successful move in his kindly efforts. He thought there could be no refusal from Louise when the money seemed to come from her mother. With all his honest kindness Ralph had the peculiar conceit of the self-made man. His success was largely due to his confidence in himself. The confidence grew with the success and the little matter of a girl's heart seemed a trifling thing to conquer. He had never doubted that his patient and persistent methods *would eventually overcome all possible feminine reluctance.*

*He would have smiled superior to a suggestion that any*

other man might contest his claim to the love of a girl for whom he felt that he had done so much. Had he not devoted himself to her for more than two years? Had he not spent dollars and dollars for her amusement? Had he not worked for her father, first to get him positions, then to save him from his disgrace and punishment, and all for her? He grew to look upon Louise as a piece of property which he had acquired by right of preservation. What could she have done without him? And he took sweet credit to himself that in spite of such obligations he had been patient and reserved and had never pressed for his reward.

The hundred dollars which he had succeeded in making Mrs. Morliss accept was to him a hundred—dollars. Every one of those dollars was appreciated at its full value by the man who had shrewdly and hardly earned it. The money which Jack Stelwyn would have carelessly thrown to old Colon, was paid by Ralph Sconer, cheerfully and gladly it is true, but still with a full sense of the value of what he parted with. If the measure of generosity is the sacrifice of the giver Ralph's hundred meant more than ten thousand from Jack. But Ralph was not mean nor was Jack very extravagant. To Ralph, from his life's training and habits of thought, money represented far more of the desirable than it did to Jack. The value of anything wished for is usually in direct proportion to its difficulty of acquirement.

A somewhat peculiar feature of Ralph's character was his contempt of social conventionalities. The ordinary man who is shrewd and energetic enough to carve his own path to success in life has ever an eye to the cultivation of social relations which he may use to his advantage. The acquaintance of those who are richer or more influential than he, is his social ambition. The parvenu is often the development of the sycophant. But Ralph, from the consciousness of his own ability and determination, felt that he would before many years be a man of wealth and he would owe it only to himself.

He believed that John Morliss was justly convicted and sentenced, but it never occurred to him to hesitate in his determination to win and marry the daughter of a convict. It was not so much the strength of his love, though the love was true and sincere, as it was his stern confidence in himself, which made him feel that he could choose his wife as

he chose his investments, and that the world must respect her as it must respect him.

A man of Stelwyn's fiber would be capable of much rashness when influenced by powerful emotions, but nothing less than a mastering love would induce him to marry into a clouded family.

## CHAPTER XI

### AN OLD-FASHIONED LAWYER

On Thursday morning Louise sallied forth bravely upon her first business enterprise. She had studied and thought diligently over all the possible requirements of her new position, and especially over the questions that might be put to her at this trial interview with a lawyer—a Mr. Garder. She had seen something of lawyers recently and had heard their keen, searching questions to witnesses. It seemed to her that lawyers must make a business of trying to get people to say what they neither thought nor believed, and she felt as if she were about to encounter some subtle supernatural power of inquisition.

She tried to imagine Mr. Garder. He might be like the implacable, vindictive Naylor. If so she resolved to decline any offer of a position. She could never serve a wretch who had worked so fiercely to convict an innocent man. Perhaps he would be like the old Judge who had such a kindly eye and who had been so courteous to her. She wished it were Judge Servem who needed an assistant.

She realized that her name might recall the recent trial of her father. Whether or not Mr. Garder mentioned it, she resolved that he should not learn of it later than this interview. She would tell him who and where her father was, and she threw back her head and walked a little more briskly, as if she felt that the world was waiting to criticise the daughter of John Morliss.

There was no one to criticise as yet, but there were many who looked at her as she hurried along the busy streets. Louise had a certain style and air of her own, which at once distinguished her, and few whose careless glance was attracted to her failed to turn and look once more after she had passed.

*On this morning there was an unusual brightness in her*

eyes and her somewhat heightened color was due, not altogether to her brisk walk, but partly to a slight nervousness.

"Is Mr. Garder in?" she inquired of the office boy.

"No, ma'am," said the boy, stopping short in his work and staring. Then with a wild sweep of his feather duster he said: "Step right into Mr. Garder's office and sit down. He'll be here in a few minutes."

Louise walked into the little sanctum and sat down near the window. She looked at the long table covered with piles of dusty papers. She surveyed the book-shelves with their calf-covered volumes all just alike and all equally dusty. She looked at the grimy walls and out through the grimy glass at the grimy court, into which no ray of sunlight reached. Her heart sank a little at the prospect of life in such a place, and she instinctively looked down at the chair in which she was sitting and then at the sleeves of her light-colored spring waist. Yes, she had unintentionally dusted the arms of that chair.

As she looked, and thought, and dreaded the coming interview, she began to grow more nervous. It was half-past nine. This Mr. Garder must be a queer business man. The silence in this dingy court office, away from the street, became oppressive. The boy in the outer room seemed to have gone to sleep. She watched a huge spider crawling slowly down the wall, and fancied she could hear its footsteps on the plaster.

At last it became unbearable, and she got up and went to the door. The small boy, with the huge duster in one hand, was curled up on the window-sill, intent on the pages of a paper-covered book.

He started as Louise appeared.

"Yes, ma'am," he said, "he'll be here right away now. He pro'bly had some motions to argue."

"I suppose Mr. Garder is a pretty busy man?" said Louise tentatively.

"Yes, indeed, ma'am, we run a big law business here."

Louise smiled, and the boy smiled widely.

"Won't you tell me your name?" said Louise affably.

"Sammy Sterling, ma'am," replied the boy with an awkward bow.

"I see you like to read, Sammy."

"Yes, ma'am. That's the boss story. 'The Belated Bridegroom.' Did you ever read it?"

"I'm afraid I never did," said Louise. "You like reading better than dusting, don't you, Sammy?"

The boy twirled his duster and looked slyly out of his eye corners.

"Well, ma'am," he said, "you see, the old man don't wan't things disturbed too much. He's a queer old duck. One day he jumps on me for not dusting and the next time it's 'Why don't you let papers and things alone?' So I just have to make a compromise and take the chance of a verdict. But take him all round he's about the nicest old bird that's flying."

Louise began to feel more cheerful.

"Sammy," she said. "Come in here a moment with that duster. Now just look at the dirt. Do you suppose Mr. Garder likes that?" and she picked up a package of papers and rubbed her finger down the top, leaving a white mark

"Lord, ma'am! you musn't touch them papers. Them's the claim papers in a big case that's coming to trial next week."

"Well, then they ought to be clean. Now, Sammy, dust them all off carefully and put them back."

"Lord, ma'am, I don't da'st to touch them papers."

"Nonsense," said the girl. "I da'st to. Give me the duster, Sammy," and as the boy surrendered his weapon and stood gazing in open-mouthed astonishment, Louise went swiftly to work, carefully lifting and brushing off each package and replacing it where it was before.

The dust began to fly, and Louise, becoming interested in her work, stopped for a moment to tur 1 back her cuffs. A lock of dark hair became loose and fell down on her forehead. She brushed it back impatiently, thereby disarranging her hat and leaving a sooty streak on her forehead.

The boy slowly awoke from his stupor of amazement and began to help, replacing the packages as she directed him.

"Say, but you're a dandy," he said confidentially.

"Who's a dandy, Sammy?" said a quiet voice, as Mr. Garder entered the room.

Sammy turned quickly and fled to the outer office.

The duster fell and the color rose as Louise with hat awry and sleeves turned up faced the man whom she had so dreaded to encounter.

*There was a merry twinkle in the old lawyer's eye which*

belied his stern lips. He picked up the duster and hurled it after the boy, then closed the office door.

"So Miss Morliss," he said, "you enter upon your duties without an engagement, and begin by disarranging my papers."

For an instant the blood left her cheeks, then as she hesitated and looked into the old man's face, his eyes and his lips smiled with such a kindly smile that her heart sent back a quick flush of warm relief to her face and she also was forced to smile.

"Really, Mr. Garder," she said, "I didn't mean to, but I waited until the dust made me nervous, and I couldn't help it."

"I don't blame you, Miss Morliss," said the lawyer heartily. "That stupid boy of mine has no more idea of cleanliness in an office than," he paused and looked about with another quiet smile, "than I have."

Mr. Garder sat down in the chair before the table.

"Please take a seat, Miss Morliss," he said. "I presume you came in answer to my letter?"

"Yes, Mr. Garder," said Louise, as without a thought of dust she took the chair to which he pointed. "I only hope that I have not ruined my prospects by my attack of"—she hesitated for a word—then with a smile, "well, housekeeping."

The old lawyer was leaning back in his chair and looking at her with a quiet smile of pleased contemplation. There was a keen scrutiny behind the smile of his eyes, and the quick instinct of the girl detected it, but with the impulse of her dominant thought, misunderstood it. She became dignified and grave, and her cheeks lost something of their fresh coloring as she said:

"Mr. Garder, I think it right that I should tell you, if you do not know it already, that my father —"

With a quickly-raised hand the old man checked her, and with the same deep but kindly scrutiny he watched the blood come back to her face as he slowly lowered his hand and said:

"Miss Morliss, let me assure you it is unnecessary. I know the whole story." He bent over the table and nervously shuffled a bunch of papers as if trying to select some *important document*. Then he threw them all on the table *again and looked up as he continued gravely, "Miss Morliss, we lawyers know very well that judges and juries often make*

sad mistakes." He leaned back quietly in his chair and said in a different tone:

"Miss Morliss, I need some one here to help me with my accounts and," he smiled, "some one to see that Sammy does the dusting. Are you willing to undertake such a task?"

Louise had entirely forgotten the carefully studied demeanor which she had prepared for this interview. Nothing had been said or done as she expected. Now, she only felt that this old lawyer had a kind and friendly heart, and his gentle courtesy made her suddenly weak where she had resolved to be strong.

There was a little film of quickly repressed tears over the dark eyes and a slight tremor in the clear voice as she answered:

"Mr. Garder, I shall be very glad to undertake the task," then with a smile responsive to his own, "I think I can manage Sammy, if I fail in the accounts."

"That is very satisfactory, Miss Morliss," said the old man, as he rose with some nervousness. "If you can manage Sammy, I have no doubt about the accounts. Now, shall we say to-morrow morning to begin, or would you prefer to wait a day or two?"

"I am ready at any time, Mr. Garder, to-day if you wish."

"No, no, not to-day," said Garder, looking about the room somewhat helplessly. "To-morrow morning, Miss Morliss, at nine o'clock. I can then have more time to show you what your duties will be. I—shall be quite busy this morning—and I'm afraid you couldn't help me yet. Good-morning," and to the surprise of Louise he shook hands with her as warmly as if she had been his best client.

"Good-morning, Mr. Garder," she said, "I will be here promptly at nine o'clock to-morrow."

"Yes, yes, thank you. Oh! by the way, Miss Morliss. We have not talked about your salary. What wages would you expect?"

Louise was somewhat perplexed at this strange and unexpected manner of her new employer. But she reflected that nothing had been as she had expected.

"Mr. Garder," she said. "I had not thought much about the amount of the salary. I want to earn something if I can. After you have tried my help for a little while you can decide what you think I am worth."

"I can't do business on any such loose basis," said the  
g

old man, with a stern voice and a kindly glance. "If it pleases you, Miss Morliss, to begin at seventy-five dollars per month, I shall be glad to pay you that salary at first. What do you think? Will that be satisfactory?"

"It is very satisfactory, Mr. Garder—I only hope I may be worth so much to you." Louise again colored with pleasure at this unexpected success.

"I have no doubt of it, Miss Morliss. Very well. Thank you. Good morning," and the lawyer opened the door for his new assistant to pass out, and bowed as if to the daughter of a millionaire client.

As he closed the door behind her, Louise espied Sammy making a wild rush at the opposite wall with his duster. She knew the boy had been listening at the door, and she was so filled with the new intoxicating joy of success that she could not refrain from a little fun.

"Sammy," she said, "what in the world are you doing?"

"Yes, ma'am," said the boy, without turning. "Just one minute." He delivered a carefully aimed blow at the wall with his duster, then stooped to the floor and picked up a huge struggling spider and came toward Louise, holding it out in triumph.

"I seen him, ma'am, from way across the room. I been laying for that chap for days. We get lots of 'em here, ma'am, but this feller's a jim-dandy."

There was a gleeful sparkle in the boy's eyes as he came close to Louise, holding out the wriggling enormity.

If there was anything that made the girl shudder with abhorrence it was a spider. How had that boy discovered her weakness?

She did not shriek, but she grew pale, and Sammy's eyes danced with delight.

"Say—Ain't he a daisy, ma'am?" he said, cheerfully, as he held up the spider for her close inspection.

"Sammy, please throw it away. They're poisonous, you know."

"Sho! You ain't afraid of spiders, are you? Why, I was readin' in a book about a prisoner that was locked up in a solitary cell in some state's prison, that tamed a whole lot of 'em and made pets of 'em. They used to come and crawl *all over him.*" The boy released the wounded spider and *let it crawl slowly up his hand.*

Louise shuddered. "Sammy," she said, "please throw it out of the window. Come, I want to tell you something."

"Oh, yes, ma'am. I'll let him go, I will," and he set the spider on the floor and set his foot on the spider. "That's the only way to treat them fellers. We're just infested with 'em here, ma'am."

Louise drew a long breath. "Well, Sammy," she said, "to-morrow morning you and I will have a grand hunt, and we'll kill every one of the nasty things."

"Be you coming down to-morrow?"

"Yes, I'm coming every day to help Mr. Garder, and the principal thing he wants is to have me look after your dusting."

The boy made a long face, but there was a gleam of mischief in his eye, as he said:

"So you're going to be one of us. Well, ma'am, the dusting is all right, and we'll kill all the roving spiders, but I've got a little lot of pet ones that I'm trainin', and I shan't show you where I keep those."

Louise smiled. "Sammy," she said, "let's be good friends, will you?"

"Sure, ma'am," answered the boy. "I'm agreeable, but I got to keep my pet spiders."

"All right, Sammy; but you must promise to keep them to yourself."

"Yes, ma'am, I'll promise—so long as we're good friends."

"That's a bargain, then," said the girl, laughing, as she held out her hand. "Remember, Sammy, spiders cut friendship."

"Yes, ma'am," said Sammy, as he gravely shook hands; "and spiders grows very fast about this office—and don't you forget it."

Louise went away feeling very happy. She knew she would like Mr. Garder. She was overjoyed at the prospect of earning seventy-five dollars a month, and she thoroughly enjoyed the boyish mischievousness of her little fellow-worker.

After closing the door of his private office, Mr. Garder sat down and deliberately neglected the business that had seemed so pressing. He looked at the pile of papers before him, picked up one of them, and put on his glasses. After a moment he laid down the paper, took his glasses in his

hand, and leaned back in his chair. His glance traveled slowly about the little office, and it appeared to him darker and dirtier than ever before.

Something that seemed to him like sunshine had been there for a little time. He had felt vaguely distressed and annoyed by the unwonted warmth and brightness, but now that the sunshine was gone the musty gloom in which he had lived for so many years suddenly became noticeable and oppressive. The busy lawyer forgot his business, and the old bachelor dreamed a little day-dream of the might-have-beens. The bright, earnest young girl, with those swiftly-truthful eyes and that gentle, dignified poise of manner that commanded respect while it courted friendship—she was a not-impossible-to-have-been daughter.

His kindly old heart grew warm with his dream, and the clear-headed man of facts was for once swayed by his fancies. His imagination had suddenly given Louise a place in his heart which years of acquaintance might not have secured for her.

For an hour he sat and dreamed, then with a smile he shook himself together and turned again to his papers. At twelve o'clock he went to the club, and was apparently engrossed in a morning journal, when the expected and expectant Stelwyn approached him.

"Well, old man, you have some news for me?"

"News, Jack? What about?" said the lawyer, with an affectation of surprise. "Oh, yes, about those Fruitfulness bonds. I've looked up the thing, Jack. Better let them alone. I—"

"Damn your bonds, Garder, you know what I mean. Have you heard anything from Miss Morliss?"

"Oh, yes. By the way, Jack, I am very much obliged to you. I have engaged Miss Morliss on your recommendation. I realize now that you were right. I certainly do need someone in my office, and Miss Morliss pleases me very much. I am going to pay her seventy-five dollars to begin with. Do you observe, Jack, that I say *I* am going to pay her?"

"What the devil do you mean by that, Garder?"

"There's no devil in it, Jack, and you're not in it, either. *I have decided that I want that young lady's assistance, and of course I shall pay for it myself.*"

"Garder, this is a dirty trick," said Stelwyn, hotly. "You know that I want to manage this matter myself. I want to help them."

"Well, my boy, don't you suppose that my dollars will help as much as yours? Jack, she is going to *earn* my dollars, and let me tell you she won't accept anything she doesn't earn."

"You seem to be very well acquainted with her," said Stelwyn. "Look here, Garder, this is all very pretty, but where do I come in?"

"You can come in as often as you like, Jack, so long as you behave yourself."

"But confound it, man, you don't seem to understand that I am working to help the family of Mr. Morliss. I'm not able to help him much yet, and I seem to be check-mated in every attempt I make to help his wife and daughter."

"You can help Mr. Morliss or his wife. His daughter doesn't need your help. Look here, Jack, if you were to pay me to pay that girl for working in my office, don't you know she would find it out sooner or later? Jack, do you want her to learn such a thing of you? I won't have her know my part of such a transaction—and so there shall not be any such business." The old man was growing unusually excited.

Stelwyn was silent for a few minutes, nervously twisting his moustache.

"All right, Garder," he said, at last. "Have your way. I'll get even with you yet. I suppose if I came into your office you would do me the honor to introduce me to this remarkable assistant of yours?"

"I don't know as I would, Jack. Will you tell me why I should?"

Stelwyn was suddenly angry.

"Yes, Mr. Garder," he said. "I'll tell you why you should. Because I ask you to. Because I want to talk with her. Isn't that reason enough? I don't know what you have in that old head of yours. Do you think I'm not a proper acquaintance for your assistant? If you don't want to introduce me, I'll introduce myself."

"And you'd get beautifully snubbed if you tried it," said the old man, with a satisfied smile. "Never mind, Jack,

don't be offended. Come in to-morrow and you shall be presented."

"Don't say a word to her about me," said Jack.

"No," replied the lawyer, dryly. "You'll probably say enough about yourself."

And Mr. Stelwyn went away with a new plan developing itself in his fertile brain.

## CHAPTER XII

### AN INTRODUCTION AND A RETROGRESSION

After her failure in persuading Louise to accept Ralph's money, Mrs. Morliss had written a short note to Ralph, asking him to call on any morning that suited his convenience. He appeared on Friday, shortly after Louise had gone to her new duties.

Ralph had felt confident that the message—brief and clueless as it was—meant the success of his scheme. He was sure that Mrs. Morliss appreciated the necessity of his assistance, and he never doubted that her woman's wit would find a way to make her daughter accept it.

He was accordingly much discomfited when Mrs. Morliss handed him the roll of bills.

"She would not take it, Ralph. She suspected the source at once, though she did not mention your name."

"But," said Ralph, hesitating, "won't you keep it, Mrs. Morliss, to use for—her?"

"Thank you, Ralph. You are very kind, but I cannot consent to that. I was wrong to try to deceive her at first. However we may differ in our feelings, Louise is always honest with me, and I shall try to be so with her."

Ralph silently looked at the roll of bills in his hand. Mechanically, without thinking what he was doing, he began to turn back the ends and count them.

"The package is just as you gave it to me," said Mrs. Morliss.

"I beg your pardon," said Ralph, hastily thrusting the money into his pocket and growing very red in the face. "Of course it is—that is—Mrs. Morliss, I know I am acting like a fool—but I don't know what to do to help Louise."

"Louise has secured a very good position," said Mrs. Morliss, somewhat stiffly.

"Is that so?" said Ralph, with quick interest. Then he

added, with a feeling that had more of astonishment than pain: "Why! she never consulted me about it. What is it?"

"She is employed in the office of Mr. Garder, a lawyer. She answered an advertisement and went to meet him yesterday; she was engaged at once at seventy-five dollars a month."

Much as Mrs. Morliss disliked to have her daughter in an office, she was nearly as proud of her success as Louise herself.

Ralph Sconer, the business man who knew values so well, was stupefied with amazement.

"Seventy-five dollars!" he said, slowly. "And she has no experience! Mr. Garder—he is a well-known lawyer—an old man—a bachelor. There's something—" Ralph paused. He was evidently growing nervous.

Mrs. Morliss took the alarm at once. "Ralph," she said, quickly, "you don't think there's anything wrong about it, do you? Louise is a brave, resolute girl—but she knows nothing about the world."

"No," said Ralph, as he rose. "There's nothing wrong, Mrs. Morliss. It seems a little strange. I wish Louise would consult me about such matters." (This with a little tone of vexation.) "She doesn't want me to do the simplest thing for her. But—I shall look after her all the same, Mrs. Morliss. Don't be worried about it," he added. "If there should be anything wrong in the matter it will be soon righted," and Ralph left the house with a vague feeling that someone or something had somehow trespassed on his domain, and that he must find out about it all.

Louise had arrived at the office at half-past eight. Sammy had the lead by about five minutes. When she came in he was so busy with his duster that nothing less than an earthquake could have startled him. He whisked about the table and the walls and the chairs, always keeping his back to the door, where he knew Louise stood watching him. And Louise decided that as he was so industrious she would not disturb him, so she stood still for some minutes. This disconcerted Sammy. It was unexpected. Presently he turned about and appeared greatly surprised.

"*Hulloa!*" he said. "When did you come?"

"*Oh, long ago,*" said the girl, with a little laugh. "You're beginning very well, Sammy. If you keep on in that way we'll have the office very clean when Mr. Garder comes.

But you ought to open the windows and let the dust blow out."

"That's mostly so," said the boy, looking about the room with an air of deep reflection. "Let's see. Wind's south-east. Open them east windows and we'll get in all the dust that's outside. You just take this duster and I'll open the window in the office—and then you flourish the duster and that'll drive out the dust."

Louise took off her hat and jacket.

"Now, Sammy," she said, with an air of severity, "you open *all* the windows, and then we'll begin work."

"But that's dead wrong, ma'am. Don't you see—"

"Sammy, you know you're to do as I tell you!"

"Yes, ma'am," and Sammy proceeded slowly to open the windows, in the meantime studying the situation in his youthful mind.

"Now, Sammy—Mr. Garder will be here at nine o'clock, and we have half an hour. Let's get his table cleaned up nicely before he comes."

"Yes, ma'am," said the boy, meekly, as he followed her into the private office.

They worked together for fifteen minutes. Louise carefully removed all the papers, and Sammy dusted the table, cleaned and refilled the ink-stand, and then the papers were dusted and replaced in their former positions.

The boy was becoming weary. He foresaw untold labors if this was a beginning.

"Say, ma'am!" he said. "What about them spiders we was goin' to tackle this morning?"

Louise was prepared for the spider threat.

"Oh, well, Sammy," she said, "I never knew much about spiders until you told me yesterday. I read all about them last night, and got quite fond of them. Tell me about your pet ones, Sammy. Don't kill any more, will you?"

The boy was paralyzed for the moment—but he had hot shot in reserve for a last discharge.

He played with the duster for a moment, then said: "Why, I thought you was afraid of spiders, Miss Morliss."

"No, not a bit, Sammy, I like them—but how did you know my name?"

This was Sammy's opening.

"Oh, I don't know, Miss Morliss," he said, indifferently. "Guess I read it in some newspaper."

The color rushed swiftly to the girl's face. She had been half prepared for such allusions, but had not expected one from this little boy. For a moment she knew not what to say, and Sammy, seeing her evident distress, was suddenly satiated with victory, and became deeply remorseful. The mischievous boy had a chivalrous heart.

"Say, ma'am," he said, with boyish tears in his eyes, "you and me was goin' to be good friends—and now I've gone and queered it all. Please don't mind what I said. I'll dust and do anything you want, if you'll only just not be uncomfortable."

And Louise smiled and gave him her hand again, as she said: "It's all right, Sammy, we'll be good friends in spite of everything."

At that moment neither Ralph nor Jack was so heart-and-soul devoted to Louise, as was little Sammy Sterling.

Mr. Garder arrived promptly at nine o'clock, and his eyes looked so sedately pleased as he greeted Louise and glanced at the dustless table, that the girl's spirits rose again. For an hour he patiently explained to her, as well as he could, the recondite mysteries of his bookkeeping, and Louise listened eagerly, to matters of which she had not the slightest understanding, only interrupting him to suggest a possible explanation of some detail that she saw clearly and which seemed to perplex him.

When the hour's instruction was finished the pupil was in a very turbulent sea of unknown technicalities, and the lawyer felt that he had secured an assistant who knew much more than he about the keeping of accounts.

In the meantime Sammy, in the outer office, was plying his duster with a vigor and conscientiousness that would have greatly surprised his acquaintances. He dusted everything within reach, and he hunted down and slaughtered every spider that dared to show itself, with a new and peculiar vindictiveness.

At half-past ten, Louise was engaged in taking down some memoranda of charges and credits, which Mr. Garder slowly dictated, partly from odd notes on the backs of papers in his pocket and partly from memory, when Sammy suddenly opened the door of the private office and said:

"*Mr. Stelwyn, sir,*" and Jack walked in without further ceremony.

*Louise looked up and instantly recognized the good-*

looking juror of her father's trial. She bent her head over the paper to hide the quick flush of color and the sudden pallor that she knew would follow. But Mr. Garder noted it, and in one swift instant of poise and counterpoise, he decided his course of action.

"Hulloa, Jack," he said, cheerily. "Come in. I suppose you want to know about those bonds. Sit down a moment. I have a memorandum here somewhere," and he began to look through a pile of papers. He wished to give Louise a moment to prepare herself. Presently he said: "Oh, excuse me—Miss Morliss, let me introduce Mr. Stelwyn, one of our oldest clients—that is, Jack, not the oldest man that's a client of ours, but one of the oldest clients that's a man of ours. Isn't that right, Jack? I think you've been my client since you were a baby."

The lawyer had several intentions in this introduction. He wished to cover and relieve the embarrassment of Louise at meeting one of the men who had convicted her father; he wished to convey to her the knowledge that he had known this man from infancy; and he wished to remind Jack of the fact that he trusted him because of that long acquaintance.

Stelwyn bowed politely without speaking, and Louise acknowledged the salute by a slight inclination of the head. Their eyes met for one brief instant. Then Louise bent again over her work, and Jack turned to the lawyer.

"Yes, Mr. Garder," he said. "I suppose you have a sort of proprietary right to look after my worldly interests. In the matter of those bonds I don't feel sure that you have not been misled in your judgment. What is the memorandum you spoke of?"

"I thought I had it right under my hand. Miss Morliss, will you please look among those scraps I gave you. It may have strayed in there."

Louise looked over the papers and brought them to the lawyer.

"What was it like, Mr. Garder?" she asked. "I see nothing about bonds here."

"No, never mind," said the lawyer. "I must have left it at home. Jack, if you are in any hurry about the matter, we will walk over and see the agent and you can hear for yourself what he has to say."

"Very well," answered Stelwyn. "I have nothing better to do this morning."

"Excuse me a few moments," said Mr. Garder, as he rose. "I must look up an authority before I go out. I won't detain you but an instant," and he stepped into the outer office to the large book-case.

Jack recognized his opportunity and nerved himself to take advantage of it.

"Miss Morliss," he said, in his most polished manner, "excuse me—is not your father an artist?"

Louise looked up with quick anger. She knew of course that Stelwyn knew who her father was. Why had he dared to allude to him? But Jack's face never changed in its expression of calm, polite inquiry, and his eyes looked into hers without a trace of any meaning more than his simple words conveyed.

The girl's glance fell. "My father has been all his life very fond of painting," she answered, coldly.

"I remember to have seen a little water-color of his some years ago," continued Jack, still in the same placid tone. "It pleased me very much, and I have often looked for more work from the same hand. I am very fond of paintings, and study the different styles of work with great interest. Had your father any studio in the city, Miss Morliss?"

Louise could always be appealed to through her loyal admiration of her father. She felt a little less cool toward this gentlemanly young man, who showed such rare appreciation. For the moment she half forgot that he had been a member of that cruel jury.

"My father was never very successful in getting his paintings exhibited or sold," she said, simply. "He was devoted to his art more for the art's sake than for reputation. Only a very few knew of his work. He could never afford to hire a studio, so he painted in a little attic room at home."

"I am very much interested, Miss Morliss," said Stelwyn, politely. "It seems hardly fair to the people who love art that a man capable of such admirable work as the little sample that I saw, should keep it all for his own enjoyment. I should be very grateful for an opportunity to see some of his paintings."

"My father will be much pleased to hear of your interest, Mr. Stelwyn," said the girl, with a little flush of happiness *at the thought*. She hesitated for a moment, then continued, *with a smile*. "The paintings are all in the attic studio *at home*. I could have them sent to any place—"

Stelwyn interrupted her: "Please don't think I would put you to such trouble, Miss Morliss. If it would not inconvenience you to let me call and see them there, I should be very much pleased to do so. I had almost lost the hope of ever seeing any more of Mr. Morliss' work."

"We shall be glad to have you call, Mr. Stelwyn. We live at 389 Norden Street. I shall not be at home now except on Sundays, but my mother will be happy to guide you up the dark stairs if you really care to take so much trouble."

"Thank you very much, Miss Morliss. I am sure my little trouble will be more than repaid. May I call next Sunday morning?"

"Certainly, Mr. Stelwyn."

"Are you ready, Jack?" said Mr. Garder, entering the room.

"Quite so," said Stelwyn, rising. "Good morning, Miss Morliss."

"Good morning, Mr. Stelwyn."

"You seem to have lost no time, Jack," said the lawyer, as they reached the street. "What power of fascination have you used to engage that young woman in so much conversation?"

"Never mind, Garder—perhaps I'll tell you about it later."

Louise sat down to her work and began slowly to be surprised at herself. She had allowed, no, invited this man to call on her, and he was one of those who had publicly sworn that they believed her father guilty. And then unconsciously she began to make excuses for him. He had never known her father as Ralph had. All he had heard was the evidence at the trial. Perhaps he would sometime realize that he had made a mistake. But what did that matter, anyway? He admired her father's paintings, and she was proud to show them to anyone. She thought with a glow of joy of the happiness her old father would feel when he learned that his work was beginning to be appreciated. Perhaps Mr. Stelwyn might even buy one of the pictures. What a triumph that would be!

She worked carefully and conscientiously at memorandum accounts which Mr. Garder had given her to enter in the books. Louise was not entirely ignorant of the noble art of bookkeeping, for she knew the difference between *debit* and *credit*—and she slowly dared to suspect as she looked over the pages of the single big book in which Mr.

Garder kept his accounts, that perhaps her employer sometimes forgot that distinction. The entries, often in pencil, were sadly confused and confusing. Often the charge for services and the credit for money received were jumbled together in the same column. Across the face of some accounts which showed a large balance due, Mr. Garder had written the single word "Settled," with no credit entry to show how it was settled.

As she mused over these peculiarities it occurred to her feminine curiosity to look for the name Stelwyn in the index. She found his account covering some six pages and showing vaguely that Mr. Stelwyn must have paid her employer a good round sum of money in the three years since this ledger was opened. The last entry read in pencil, with no date: "Credit Stelwyn's ck. \$175.00 and charge him with my ck. \$150.00 dep. in 2nd Natl. for Jack's enterprise." This of course meant nothing to her, as she never dreamed of connecting the account with any of her own affairs.

Suddenly she felt guilty, as if she were prying into private affairs. She had looked casually over many other accounts in the book, but had intentionally turned to this one. She closed the book with a little blush, and called to Sammy through the open door. The sound of the wielding of the duster had ceased for some time, and a deathly silence reigned in the outer office.

She heard a sudden scrambling as the boy descended from his perch on the window-sill. Then a few quick whisks of the duster, and Sammy appeared.

"Did you call me, ma'am?" he asked. "I was so busy I wasn't quite sure."

"Oh, yes, Sammy, I've heard you at work. You must have everything very clean by this time."

"You just bet it is, ma'am. There ain't no dust in that office, and I give you my word of honor there ain't a livin' spider to be seen. I've killed nigh about seven hundred."

"Why, you're a real hero. Seven hundred dead spiders! I'm proud of you."

"I'm right onto 'em, ma'am, when I get my nerve up," said the boy. "I know all their dodges."

"Sammy"—Louise was on the point of asking him about *Mr. Stelwyn*, but she suddenly felt an unaccountable reluctance to approach the subject. Again it seemed to her like an invasion of private rights.

"Yes, ma'am," said the boy, expectantly.

"I was only going to tell you that you worked so hard this morning that I won't scold you if you read your story now."

"Thank you, ma'am," said Sammy, with a little twinkle in his eye. "I do feel pretty tired, and there's nothing ever rests me up like a good book," and he returned swiftly to his window-seat.

At twelve o'clock Louise arranged her papers and left the office to go home to lunch. As she stepped out on the street she met Ralph Sconer.

"Good morning, Louise," said Ralph. "I hear you are to be congratulated on having found a very fine position."

"How did you hear?" asked Louise, as they walked along together.

"I was at the house this morning, and your mother told me," said Ralph, honestly. He continued: "I wish you had consulted me about it, Louise. I could easily have found a good place for you, if I had known you were determined to work."

The girl was becoming annoyed at this persistent, guardian-like manner that Ralph had lately assumed.

"You see I found a good place, Ralph, without your help," she said, lightly. "You certainly knew that I didn't wish to starve—and you ought to know that I would not live on—charity."

Ralph winced a little. "I never wanted you to live on charity," he said. "Surely a little temporary assistance from sincere and honest friends should not be called *charity*."

"All the same, Ralph, you see I did not need even that assistance."

"Tell me about this position, Louise. Is it a fact that you are paid seventy-five dollars in a lawyer's office when you never had any experience?"

"That is the fact, Ralph, strange as it may seem."

"It is very strange," said the young man. "So strange that I cannot understand it. Louise, please be careful. Young girls do not understand all the unpleasant sides of life in an office. You are very inexperienced. Will you trust me enough to tell me at once if anything disagreeable should happen?"

*Louise blushed with indignant anger for an instant; then she laughed a little scornful laugh, as she said:*

"Ralph, I suppose you really mean well, but do you know, you are singularly unfortunate in your ways of showing it. I assure you, Ralph, that I am not in the slightest danger. You need not waste a moment in worrying about me. I have an absurd female notion that I can look out for myself well enough."

Ralph shook his head sadly.

"Please excuse me," he said, presently. "Really I did not mean to offend you."

"Oh, I am not in the least offended," said Louise, with a little manner of being wearied by the discussion.

They reached the cottage in silence.

"Good-by, Ralph," said the girl. "I must hurry back to the office, so I will not ask you to come in."

And Ralph went back again, feeling unaccountably discomfited. He had gone backward this morning farther than he knew.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE GODDESS OF LUCK IS FORCED INTO SERVICE

There was a certain short alley in the business district of the city of Compos. It connected two of the principal streets, and was somewhat of a thoroughfare for hurried men of business, who always look out for short cuts. But although many walked quickly through the alley, the careful investigator would have discovered that a large proportion of those who entered at either end did not immediately appear at the other end. They had stopped somewhere in the short passage. There was but one establishment that fronted on the alley. It was a three-story building, and was located about midway between the two streets. Over its worn and dingy door was the modest sign, "Tom's Place." One of the dirty windows bore the inscription, "Wines, Liquors and Cigars." The other window advised the wayfarer that steaks and chops would be served to order. Across the second story was a sign which spelled in large letters, "Billiards and Pool." There was nothing to announce what was supplied by the third story.

One would hardly expect that such an unobtrusive, out-of-the-way little establishment could be largely patronized, but an observer who watched the door for an hour either of the day or of the night would be forced to the conclusion that the interior must furnish sources of pleasure or interest of which the forbidding exterior gave no promise. He would notice, perhaps, that of the large number of men, apparently of all classes, who passed in and out of that door, many gave a hasty glance up and down the alley before proceeding. If the observer were a physiognomist he might after some observation detect a certain slight peculiarity of face and manner that seemed common to the majority of Tom's guests, whether old or young, well-dressed or shabby. And if he had made a study of types he would easily recognise the *habitual gambler*.

Most of the patrons passed through the saloon and seemed eager to reach the billiard tables above, and having reached the second story, they appeared to have lost interest in billiards, and continued up the second flight of narrow stairs to the unannounced attractions of the third story. Their ambition carried them no higher, for here, in a large, secluded apartment, well furnished and well lighted, were to be found faro and roulette and poker, and other of those golden bows of promise with which the fickle goddess ever encourages her votaries.

At night the alley was dark, save for the faint reflections that struggled in from the street at either end, and the single dim gas-lamp that hung like a beacon light in a fog, over the entrance to "Tom's Place."

For several nights during the week which we have been recording, the same man entered the alley regularly at about eight o'clock. He did not pass out at the other end, nor did he enter the seductive portals that allured so many. He appeared to enjoy gazing at those portals, however, for he invariably took up his position in an angle of the wall nearly opposite "Tom's Place," where he was completely hidden in the shadow and could command a view of the entrance. There he watched and waited patiently and silently night after night until twelve o'clock, at which time he quietly departed from the alley. He was a rough-looking fellow, with dark, unshaven face and brown, hard-looking hands, and his costume and appearance suggested a fore-the-mast hand out of a job.

No one disturbed him in his shadowy post of observation. The human moths that fluttered into the alley at night saw only Tom's alluring lantern. The rare policeman either stopped for a drink and a talk at the bar, or passed quickly through the alley without a glance to the right or left. The enforcers of the city ordinances of Compos had not been instructed to investigate the mysteries of that alley. They had no desire to turn search-lights into its gloomy corners.

On the third night of his vigils, at about half-past eleven, the watcher started forward suddenly and looked keenly at a man who came out of Tom's Place. The man was Thomas Sconer, and he walked out slowly, with his hands in his pockets and his hat pulled down over his eyes.

*The watcher drew back and shook his head. "No use*

to-night," he muttered to himself. "He's cleaned out, and ugly."

But on Thursday night, as the waiting sailor was about to leave his post, the dark figure of Thomas Sconer again appeared at the door, and the dim light of the hanging lantern illumined his upturned face for an instant.

"You're a winner!" murmured the watcher. "And you're my meat."

Sconer had reached the end of the alley, when a hand was laid lightly on his arm. He turned quickly, and, with a savage oath, struck out at the dusky figure behind him. The sailor staggered beyond his range and said, in a hoarse voice:

"Easy now, Capt'n, I don't want to rob you."

"What the hell do you want, then?" said Sconer.

He stepped quickly out to the lighted sidewalk, and turned to face the man, who followed him.

"Well, Capt'n," said the sailor, slowly, bending his head forward and glaring at Sconer with a sullen, bull-dog ferocity in his blood-shot eyes, "I'll tell you what I want—what me and my mate wants. We wants enough o' that stuff you won to-night to get us good and drunk."

"You're drunk now," said Sconer, looking nervously up and down the silent street. "I hain't won no stuff. Here, take this quarter and buy another drink."

"Tain't enough, Capt'n," said the man. "Me and my mate agreed as to how this job was worth fifty dollars, and I've been layin' for your luck to nail it."

Again Sconer looked up the street. No one in sight. He had won some two hundred dollars, and was nervous. This fellow talked of his "mate." There were two of them, then.

"See here, my man," he said. "You're drunk or else crazy. I don't know what you're talking about. Here's a dollar. Take it and get out quick, or I'll call the police and run you in."

"No, you won't call no police," said the sailor. "Me and you'll fix this matter and there won't be no runnin' in unless you get's run in. You don't know me, do you?" and he thrust his dirty face forward and leered at Sconer with an ugly grin.

"No, damn you! I don't know you," said Sconer, as he drew back.

"No, you don't know me," said the man, approaching closer. "But I knows you, Tom Sconer, and my mate he

knows you, and we both knows where you was and what you was doin' last Febr'y fourteen at eight bells o'night down there at Coldart and Goolie's, and we knows, 'cause we seen you—see?"

Sconer felt a quick shiver of alarm, but he braced himself with his usual dogged resolution.

"You drunken dog, do you think you're goin' to bullyrag me with your lies? I'll give you nothing," and he turned to walk away.

The sailor was at his side in an instant.

"Don't try no bluff game like that," he said, "'cause me and my mate's all in trim to make our affidavies to-morrow—and when we does that it'll send you where that chap Morliss is—and we'll do it, too, if you don't pony up to-night. I'm tired layin' for you, and I know you got the stuff to-night."

Sconer hesitated. What had this man and his mate seen? How much could they swear to?

"Walk along here with me and we'll talk about it," he said, gruffly.

"I'm not walkin' or talkin' till I've had a big drink," said the sailor.

A brilliant idea occurred to Sconer. He would get this fellow drunk, find out what he knew, and then get rid of him.

"All right," he said, in a more conciliating tone. "If you want to drink, we'll have to go back to Tom's. There's no other place open around here."

"Mind your eye, Sconer. Ye can't play no tricks on me now. I'll go back to Tom's with ye, and have a drink, and I'm not disagreein' to a little talk a'rterwards—but ye might just as well turn over that fifty, 'cause I'm goin' to stay with ye till I get it."

"Never mind the fifty now," said Sconer. "That'll be all right. Let's get our drink. I'm getting dry myself. Go ahead," and he motioned with his arm for the sailor to precede him down the dark alley.

"'Scuse me," said the man, with a cunning leer. "Arter you, Capt'n. You knows the way," and he drew back for Sconer to take the lead.

"Well, we'll walk together, then," said Sconer, and, side by side, each on the alert for an attack, the two made their way over the rough pavement, guided through the darkness by *Tom's never-failing lantern*.

As they entered the saloon, Sconer said to the man behind the bar: "Two whiskies, Bill, in the back room," and the sailor added with a drunken emphasis: "And make 'em damned big ones, Mr. Bill."

There were nine or ten men lounging against the bar, all more or less intoxicated, some drinking deep and talking loudly because they had won; others drinking deep and talking not at all, because they had lost.

One man alone at the end of the bar, with a glass of liquor before him, leaned his elbow on the bar, and, with bowed head and limp figure, seemed the very picture of the despondent gambler. He paid no attention to the noisy profanity of the men who stood near him. Now and again he took a little sip from his glass, and then relapsed into his former nerveless melancholy. No one seemed to observe him particularly. Such cases were daily and hourly features of Tom's Place.

But the sailor observed him, and he observed the sailor, and a quick glance passed between them.

When the bartender had poured out two glasses of whiskey and two glasses of water, and with this refreshment on a tray, had started for the little back room, whither Sconer and the sailor had preceded him, this despondent gambler slowly lounged away from the bar, and with a slightly indefinite gait, lounged down the saloon after the bartender. No one noticed him or thought of him. When the bartender emerged from the back room, he did not encounter this forlorn wreck, because the wreck had drifted past the door of the room and had come to anchor on the top of an empty box in a dark corner against the thin board partition of the room in which Sconer and the sailor were seated. If any investigator had flashed a light upon this desperate gambler in his corner, he would have seen him with an ear close to the partition and a notebook and pencil in his hands.

But the desperate gambler did not need the flashlight to enable him to jot down in shorthand the conversation which he heard distinctly through a convenient knothole in the sheathing partition.

The sailor picked up the glass and swallowed the whiskey at one gulp. Sconer took a sip of his. The bartender tarried for a moment.

"More!" said the sailor. "I'm too dry to talk, Capt'n." "Bring two more whiskies, Bill," said Sconer.

"Bring six more, Bill," said the sailor. "The drinks are on you, Capt'n, and I'm goin' to have all I want, damn ye, all I want, I say. D'ye hear me, Tom Sconer?" His voice rose with his drunken anger, and he thumped the table with his fist.

"Bring in a quart bottle, Bill," said Sconer. "I always pays my bets in full," and as the bartender disappeared, he continued, "Now, Mr. What's-your-name, if you've got anything to say to me, shoot it off."

"I've said most of what I've got to say to you, Tom Sconer," replied the sailor, doggedly. "I'm sayin' nothing more till I see that bottle."

The bartender brought in the bottle, set it down on the table, and disappeared. The sailor quickly filled and emptied two glasses in succession.

"Now will you talk?" said Sconer.

The man stood up and looked slowly about the room with an imbecile craftiness in his half-glazed eyes.

He leaned forward over the table and said, thickly:

"Mis'r Sconer—gimme that fifty. Fif' dols 's what I want. Me'n my mate's go' t' have fif' dols. Then I'll talk."

"Sit down," said Sconer. "Take another drink."

"I'll go ye one," said the man, as he poured out and swallowed another glassful. "Now fork it out, will ye?"

"What'll I give ye fifty dollars for?" said Sconer.

"Wha' for!" said the man, angrily. "Cause ye go' t' do it. Me'n my mate's got ye, Tom Sconer. We seen ye."

"What do you think you saw?" asked Sconer.

The man braced himself with an apparent effort to talk steadily.

"Think we saw! Don' *think* we saw anything. Know what we saw. Saw you, Tom Sconer, climb up that 'ere ladder and pry up the winder. Saw ye come down the ladder. Saw that feller Morliss grab ye, and—" the sailor chuckled hoarsely, "we seen him shake ye like a rat, and we seen ye run for the river—like a—like a rat—damn ye."

"Take another drink," said Sconer, nervously, "and don't talk so loud."

"I've got enough drink for business," answered the other.

"Gimme that fifty or I'll talk louder, and wha's more, me and my mate'll talk with affidavies to-morrow."

"Where were you when you thought you seen all this rubbish?" asked Sconer.

"We was all right, we was," answered the man, with a cunning smile. "We was a lyin' hove to in the back of the alley. Never you mind what we was a doin' there—but I'll just tell ye one thing, Tom Sconer, if we hadn't seen that cuss Morliss we'd a jumped you."

Sconer was becoming very nervous. It was after one o'clock. This man seemed to grow more sober and determined with every drink. There were two men who would make sworn statements of what they saw on that night. It might cause him serious trouble. He began to weaken.

"Your whole yarn is a cussed lie," he said. "If I give you the fifty dollars, how do I know you won't go back on me?"

"You don't know nothin' about it, 'cept what I tell ye. If ye don't trot out that fifty, them affidavies goes to good hands to-morrow. If the fifty's a comin', me and my mate's off down the river for a little time. We ain't wantin' to lock ye up, but we've got to have our fair shake, see?"

"Will you give me a receipt for the fifty?"

"Give ye nothin'. I ain't signin' my name to no dokyments 'cept to an affidavy."

Sconer reflected a moment and took a drink. The sailor also took one.

"What is your name?" asked Sconer.

"Call me Pete, for short. Them as gets the affidavy'll know what my name is."

"I suppose you think you can hound me all the time now. Who's your mate?"

"His name'll appear in the affidavy," said the sailor, with an ugly grin. "What ye monkeyin' about, Tom Sconer? Don't ye think we know what we seen? You ain't a goin' to tell me ye wasn't up and down that ladder on the night of Febr'y fourteen. Be ye now?"

The sailor leaned forward with so fierce a look that Sconer shrunk back afraid of the man's violence.

"I ain't sayin' where I was," said he. "I suppose I've got to give ye some money." He put his hand in his pocket and loosened a roll of bills—pulling out one.

"There's a twenty," he said, throwing it across the table. "That'll do you."

"Get into that pocket again, Tom Sconer," said the sailor. "A bargain's a bargain and fifty's the bargain. Me and my mate'll keep dark on that job when we get's the fifty."

"You swear to keep your mouth shut if I give you fifty?"

said Sconer. With the desperation of a man in a corner he even felt that a promise from this ruffian sailor would be consoling.

"We sticks by our trade," said the man, "when we gets the stuff."

With a muttered oath Sconer extracted two more bills from his pocket and passed them over. The sailor examined them.

"That's the talk, Sconer," said he. "Now here's the articles! You gives us this fifty dollars and we agrees to say nothin' about seein' you robbin' Coldart & Goolie and seein' Morliss tackle you. That's right, ain't it?"

"Don't talk so loud, you fool," said Sconer, rising. "You've got your fifty dollars and you've agreed to keep your mouth shut. I'm goin' home," and he stepped to the door.

"That's all right, Cap'n," said the sailor. "Me and my mate'll stay by the articles. I'll just sit and finish this bottle."

Sconer left the room and the saloon. In the alley he reflected that now that the man had his money he would probably drink himself into a stupor. He waited, walking back and forth in the alley, and out on the streets. In half an hour he returned to Tom's Place.

He looked into the back room. There was no one there. The whiskey bottle was empty. The sleepy bartender roused himself to say that he had supposed the sailor went out with Sconer. He hadn't seen him since.

At twelve o'clock on Friday night the detective made his report.

After recounting his adventures, he handed Jack three greenbacks, amounting to fifty dollars, and a written report of the conversation between Sconer and the pseudo-sailor, to which was attached the affidavit of the stenographer that this was a true copy of the shorthand notes which he had made at Tom's Place, etc.

"It is not quite what I hoped for, Mr. Stelwyn," said Slick. "I aimed to extract a definite admission of his guilt, in the hearing of the stenographer—a man from our own office—but Sconer has a certain shrewdness that makes me respect him more than I did at first."

"Why, Slick," said Jack, "this is an admission of his guilt. *He has paid fifty dollars hush money to a man that he thinks could convict him of the crime.*"

"It's a good pull in the right direction, Mr. Stelwyn, but

somehow the thing didn't work quite right. He could swear, you see, that he paid the money only to get rid of a ruffian that he feared would rob him of more. We can't touch him yet with any assurance of success. But we gain ground. It's slow work, Mr. Stelwyn, this building up a strong case."

"Slow! Yes, it is!" said Jack, impatiently. "And Mr. Morliss is suffering an unjust sentence while we build up a slow, substantial case. We must hurry this, Slick," and Stelwyn began to pace the room and puff cigarette smoke.

"What do you propose to do now?" he said, suddenly stopping and facing the detective.

"I have two or three plans to develop and experiment with. Give me another week to work, Mr. Stelwyn, and I may be able to get something more conclusive in the way of evidence."

Stelwyn did not answer for a few moments. He nervously chewed his cigarette. Presently he said:

"Go ahead with your planning, Slick. Develop and experiment and report. I have a plan, too, and by God I'll work it."

"Mr. Stelwyn," said the detective, with professional dignity, "am I to understand that you wish to step in and do the work that you are employing me to do?"

"Not a bit of it, Slick," said Jack, with a pleasant smile. "Don't be offended. You have done wonderfully. I would not interfere with you on any account. Please keep at work. What I had in mind has no connection with Sconer or the line you are following. I want you to run him to earth as soon as possible."

"Mr. Stelwyn, if you appear in this matter, even in the most indirect way, you may seriously entangle my lines and destroy our good prospect of success."

"My dear fellow, I tell you, I shall not appear in the matter. Please go on as if I had said nothing. I realize and appreciate your skill far too highly to do anything without your concurrence."

Mr. Slick smiled cordially as he rose. Even the most completely armored detective has his vulnerable point.

"Thank you, Mr. Stelwyn," he said. "I shall try to deserve your kind commendation. I will report again as soon as possible, but I must beg your indulgence for a week or perhaps two weeks."

"Do as you have done, Mr. Slick. Use your judgment.

and do not let my impatience hinder you from taking the time that you think necessary."

For an hour after Mr. Slick had gone Jack sat thinking, and the longer he thought the more his face brightened.

"It will work," he said at last. "It must work. Sunday morning we begin."

## CHAPTER XIV

### A CONSPIRACY IN A STUDIO

Sunday morning in Mr. Stelwyn's bachelor quarters was commonly a season of repose. Old Colon had standing orders to refrain from any interruptions of that repose before ten o'clock. At that hour our friend Jack, who usually passed the previous two hours awake in his bed with his books and his cigarettes, condescended from his bed, and prepared himself for an eleven o'clock breakfast.

Colon was therefore duly astonished when he received instructions to have breakfast served at eight-thirty on the Sunday following Mr. Slick's report. Stelwyn would have ordered breakfast before daylight or gone without breakfast, if he had consulted only his burning impatience to reach the house on Norden Street. He had resolved to tell Louise boldly all that he had felt (that is all that he thought he had felt), to give her a full account of what had been accomplished, and to test her courage and ingenuity by asking her assistance in the rash plan which he had been studying. His eyes glistened with a certain pride as he remembered her resolute bravery at the trial. She would dare anything for her father's sake. It would be a delight to work with such a comrade.

Louise, with a touch of resentful satisfaction, had told Mrs. Morliss the strange gentleman's interest in her father's paintings, and her mother had only replied by an incredulous sneer and a remark that perhaps there might be some fools alive still, which destroyed the possibility of further conversation on the subject.

But the girl had dwelt with delightful anticipation on the hope held out by Stelwyn's promised visit to the pictures. All day Saturday she had been more than usually bright and cheerful. Mr. Garder found his sunshine growing more sunny, and he smiled complacently and congratulated himself upon his wisdom in deciding to have an assistant. He

did not give Stelwyn the credit that was really due him for the good spirits and cheery industry of the young lady who already seemed to Mr. Garder to belong to his own establishment.

Little Samny was made joyful by a half-holiday and a half dollar to go to the ball game and altogether Mr. Garder's office was very well pleased with itself and its affairs on this Saturday.

Very early Sunday morning Louise was at work in the studio. For herself she loved every painting, even the most careless, unfinished sketch, but she tried to study what would most attract this gentleman who in her imagination had become a nearly omniscient art critic. She knew the pictures that most pleased her father and she knew those that most appealed to her, but she hesitated to trust her own judgment. Again and again she shifted the unframed canvases, trying different ones for the post of honor. At last, after all, her own taste had control. On the easel fronting the window she placed a little water-color that was to her the gem of the collection.

It was a woodland scene. A sprinkle of sunshine shimmered down through the thick foliage, and the vistas between the rough tree trunks seemed to entice to wanderings under the cool canopy; to suggest a lazy curiosity as to the little open spaces that glimpsed here and there in the distance. She could never look at the picture without smelling the dear woodsy smell and hearing the ceaseless whisperings of the leaves, as when on a Sunday nearly a year ago, she had spent the whole happy day with her father in those woods.

The door-bell rang. She gave one more hasty glance about the room, and with throbbing heart hurried down to admit the critic.

"Good-morning, Miss Morliss," said Stelwyn. "I hope I am not too early for your convenience."

"Not at all, Mr. Stelwyn, I have just been arranging the pictures. Will you please come up to our studio. It is very bohemian," she added with a little laugh, "and the stairs are quite dark. You must be on the watch for landings and windings."

*She ran lightly up the stairs, waiting at each landing for the slow-following Stelwyn, then leading on again until they reached the attic room.*

Stelwyn entered with his hat and cane in one hand and paused for an instant, looking about with an expression of pleased interest. The girl stood watching him with a slight feeling of diffidence that was new to her. More than anything she dreaded the appearance of polite disappointment in his face. She had thought so much about his interest in her father's work that she hoped for his approval as if he were the final judge of an artist's merit.

She recovered herself quickly and said: "Excuse me, Mr. Stelwyn. Let me take your hat and cane," and laid them on the window seat.

Stelwyn was looking earnestly and critically at a large oil painting, a river scene. The girl stood a little behind him waiting anxiously. She did not wish to see his face, because then he could see her own, and she suddenly feared that she was showing too much interest in his judgment.

Presently he said. "That is a most admirable piece of work, Miss Morliss." He drew back a little to get a different light on the picture and Louise hastily stepped to one side to avoid him. He turned and caught the little flush of pleasure that followed his favorable comment.

"I beg your pardon," he said and looked again at the picture.

In a moment he turned again with a slightly puzzled smile and said:

"Miss Morliss, you will not be offended if I am very frank. I am often sadly at fault in my judgment of effects in a picture, but then you know one's opinion is worth nothing unless sincere. Doesn't it seem to you—or am I wrong—that the beauty of that charming river piece is a trifle marred by those figures in the foreground?"

The girl laughed—a little happy laugh.

"My father would be delighted to hear you say that," she replied. "He put in those figures against his own will and only to please my stupid persistence. I begin to see how little I know about art."

Stelwyn smiled with a friendly twinkle in his eye as he said: "I'm very sorry to have blundered into an opposition to you, Miss Morliss, but you'll forgive me for feeling a little pleased to find my judgment endorsed by an artist like your father."

*They moved on slowly from picture to picture and Stelwyn*

commented freely, but with an admiration that was evidently sincere and earnest. Louise felt proud and happy, and her respect and approval of the critic increased with each moment.

Before the little woodland scene Jack drew a long breath of delight, and Louise, watching him, felt a special throb of pleasure at his appreciation.

"Miss Morliss," he said slowly, "that is one of the most charming water-colors that I have ever seen. It has the true breath of genius. It defies criticism, because"—he paused for a moment, still looking earnestly at the picture, then turned quickly—"well, because you know, to me, such a picture destroys a critical mood. It strikes deeper—or higher than thought. It has that nameless—something, that is beyond reckoning."

He spoke earnestly and sincerely, and Louise, carried suddenly beyond remembrance of herself and the speaker and almost to the verge of tears, said with an earnestness that was greater than Stelwyn's: "It is the dearest picture in the world to me, because it has all my father's love of nature."

She walked to the window and Jack looked again at the picture. "Yes," he said more lightly and somewhat vaguely, "that is the true secret of genius," but now as he gazed at the woodland scene he saw only the face of that young girl lighted by the glory of her tender enthusiasm.

In a moment he turned as if reluctantly from the picture.

"Miss Morliss," he said, "I want to thank you very much for this rare enjoyment. I think I am perhaps absurdly happy when I can look at such paintings. Would you—would your father part with any of them?"

Louise smiled. "He would be only too glad to dispose of them, Mr. Stelwyn. My father," she hesitated, "never seemed to understand how to sell his pictures. He is so afraid of unjust criticism that he is hardly willing to let people see them."

It was perhaps amusing that a man in state's prison should be afraid of unjust criticism of his paintings, but the thought did not occur to Louise, nor to Stelwyn. They were both too earnestly occupied with other thoughts.

"Then, if you don't object to Sunday sales, Miss Morliss," said Jack, "I would like very much to buy two of these pictures." He walked to a small oil painting and looked at it

attentively for a moment. "This one, and"—he turned to the girl with a smile—"dare I ask for the other?"

"Don't think me foolish about that wood scene, Mr. Stelwyn," said Louise. "It pleased me so much to have you admire my favorite—that was all."

"Then you will part with it?"

"We shall be glad to have you own it, Mr. Stelwyn, because you appreciate it."

"I am not sure that I appreciate it fully yet"—said Jack stepping to look at the picture again—"but I am sure that I want it—very much—and now, Miss Morliss, the little unpleasant matter of business—the price of those two paintings."

Louise hesitated and seemed slightly embarrassed. "I don't quite know what to say," she replied frankly. "Father has never spoken to me of his prices. I—I think he would be satisfied with what you think right, Mr. Stelwyn."

Jack mused for a moment, then with a smile he said: "Miss Morliss, you know you musn't leave it to a man to say what he'll give for something he wants—because he can't help saying less than he really would give. Now, since you do leave it to me, I say that I would gladly give three hundred dollars for those two pictures."

He looked at her and saw the quick blood mount to her cheeks. He did not misunderstand it, but he affected to do so.

"Please don't be offended," he said. "You know I gave you fair warning of my business instincts. Let us say, four hundred."

"Mr. Stelwyn," she said quickly, "I didn't mean that. Three hundred dollars is much more than I had dared to think of. My father will be very much pleased."

"Perhaps he will call you to account, Miss Morliss," said Jack. "I feel as though I had secured that water-color for nothing, but the trade is made now, you know. May I send for the pictures to-morrow?"

"Certainly, Mr. Stelwyn, I will have them ready." With all her coolness and self-control Louise could not conceal her delight nor could she help a very kindly feeling toward this gentleman who had been the first to recognize her father's genius.

"And the check, Miss Morliss?" said Jack, quietly. "Shall I make it to your order, or—"

"Please make it to my father," replied Louise, eagerly—"John Morliss. It will please him so much," she hesitated and suddenly grew pale. She had half forgotten for the instant. "I can have him endorse it if necessary," she said at length. Stelwyn turned toward the window as he answered carelessly. "Very well, Miss Morliss. I will send it to you at Mr. Garder's office to-morrow."

He picked up his hat and cane as if to go, but instead of going he stood silently looking through the open window at the penitentiary. He was nerving himself for the ordeal that he was now more than ever determined to go through with. Louise stood waiting behind him, expecting him instantly to turn and depart.

But he did not turn. With his back toward her and his eyes still fixed on the dark walls of the prison he said, presently:

"Miss Morliss, will you pardon me if I pain you by referring to a matter of which I would seem to have the least right to speak?" He paused for a moment. There was no answer. Still without turning his head he continued: "Since the day of that accursed trial, Miss Morliss, I have hated myself as I never hated anyone else—as I trust I may never have to hate anyone else. I will not insult you by excuses. I did the grossest injustice that one man can do another, for in spite of all the evidence, in spite of the opinions of other jurors I always *felt* that your father was innocent."

There was a little movement behind him. Louise sat down on the camp chair that stood beside the easel. Still Stelwyn looked straight before him, through the window. He felt the distress of the girl, though she said no word, and he would not needlessly increase it by so much as a look.

"Miss Morliss," he continued, "I have made my confession. I could not help telling you"—he was proceeding when Louise interrupted him.

At first, startled and pale with anger at his unexpected reference to the trial of her father, she had partly regained her composure and had listened with a strange sympathy to Stelwyn's condemnation of himself. At this point she found voice to say:

"*Mr. Stelwyn, you did not know my father. The evidence—*"

"I did not know your father, Miss Morliss, but I should have known myself and I should have trusted myself. I know myself better now, and I know beyond any *feeling* that your father was innocent."

"What do you mean, Mr. Stelwyn," said the girl, quickly.

Jack turned now for the first time and looked at Louise. "Miss Morliss," he said, "when a man feels that he has done a great wrong it seems to me the best thing he can do is to try and right it. Since the day of your father's trial I have been at work as best I knew how—to prove his innocence. I have accomplished something. I think you will be glad to know what little has been discovered."

The girl had started to her feet and approached Stelwyn. Her cheeks were pale and the light from her wide eyes seemed to burn into his brain. She laid a hand on his arm.

"Mr. Stelwyn," she said, breathlessly, "you have discovered something. Oh, please, please tell me."

She had no thought of gratitude then. She forgot to think it strange that this young man should devote his time to the help of one whom he had never known. She thought only of her father and of the possibilities for him that might lie behind Stelwyn's words.

And Jack, with that hand on his arm and those glorious eyes looking into his, for an instant only, lost his grip of himself and became speechless. Louise stepped back and the spell was broken. Stelwyn was again the commander.

"Miss Morliss," he said in his usual quiet tones, "I will tell you everything that has been done, because you have the best right to know, and because I feel that you can and will give me the best help in what I shall do. Miss Morliss, I shall never rest until your father is a free man—no, nor until the courts and the world shall proclaim him an innocent man. I have enough evidence to feel sure of securing a pardon. I will not have a pardon—will you?"

The fire in his eyes kindled an answering light in the girl's eyes, and she replied proudly :

"No! No pardon! Justice!"

Jack had not yet told her anything, but no shadow of doubt clouded her swift faith in this man. She knew without more words that her father would be vindicated. She waited for Stelwyn's explanations as for the words of omnipotence.

"Miss Morliss," said Jack, "won't you please be seated? I have not so very much to tell you. I think perhaps I have more to ask of you, but it will take a little time." Louise sat down again on the camp chair and Jack seated himself on the window sill.

The girl had no thought of conventionalities or of incongruities. This man was to her only the savior of her father. She listened eagerly for the words of salvation.

"I need not remind you, Miss Morliss," said Stelwyn, "that success in such a matter as this requires first of all the most profound secrecy. I trust you because—you are the daughter of John Morliss, and because—well," with a smile, "because I feel sure that I am right in doing so."

"You are right, Mr. Stelwyn. Only tell me what I am to do. You shall see how I will do it."

"You know, of course, Miss Morliss, who is really the guilty man."

"Yes," said Louise simply, "my father told them all at the trial."

"We are drawing the lines closely around Thomas Sconer," said Jack. "Your father's name will be cleared when Sconer is forced to take his place. That will surely come, but I fear it will be months before we can accomplish it."

Then Jack related as concisely as possible all that had been discovered by the detective. The girl listened, breathing quickly and leaning toward the speaker in the intensity of her interest.

"Mr. Stelwyn," she said at last with a little choking sound that was half laugh and half sob, "my father is free. They must set him free when all this is known."

"So I thought and felt at first, Miss Morliss. I think I am nearly as impatient as you are. But if we arrest Sconer, and should fail to convict him—then there would be no hope—for no matter what new evidence might appear, we could never bring him to trial again. This great and glorious law of ours must always have some victim—and it never releases its grip on one man until another can be supplied for his place."

"Mr. Stelwyn," said the girl with intense anxiety in her voice and look, "do you think it will take very long? You will forgive me. I never can forget my poor father in that prison."

"Nor do I forget him, for a moment, Miss Morliss. To clear his name I fear will take months. It will be surely done—but, in the meantime—he should not be in that prison. Miss Morliss," Jack leaned forward and looked eagerly into the girl's face as he said, slowly, "I think that need not be."

"What do you mean, Mr. Stelwyn?" said Louise. "Not—not a pardon?"

"No—no pardon!" replied Stelwyn, still watching her face closely.

She suddenly flushed and grew pale as she whispered, "Then you must mean *escape*?"

Stelwyn nodded and continued quickly. "I am sure it can be managed, with your help. Once free of the prison I have a plan to take Mr. Morliss where he will be absolutely out of danger and where he can enjoy a life that I know will be delightful to him, until we have convicted the real criminal—and then he will be at liberty to return if he wishes."

The color came and went in the girl's face and she breathed quickly for a moment, without speaking. The picture of her father at liberty—in a life that would be delightful to him—was too divinely beautiful—she felt as if she were dreaming. Her single-hearted devotion left no room for the thought that he must be where she could not see him for months, perhaps longer.

"Can we do it, Mr. Stelwyn?" she asked eagerly. She was already a conspirator in a secret undertaking with a man whom she had met but once before to-day.

"Miss Morliss, I know that your father is a strong man and a brave one. He will not fear to take the slight risk and incur a few hours, or days, of hardships?"

"He will dare almost anything to be free—and he is very strong now. The life there is beginning to depress him terribly."

"Where is his—room?"

"On the east side, overlooking the river, on the second floor."

Stelwyn smiled exultantly. "That makes it all the easier," he said. "Your father is a good swimmer?"

"A wonderful swimmer," replied Louise quickly. "I see—I see—but the barred window and the wall around the prison yard?"

"The window will not long remain barred to a determined

man with a good file and a few hours of nightly opportunity, and once in the courtyard he can easily find a way to scale the wall. There are sheds built against it all along the river front. Really the only hardship and the only risk is the river. The parapet of the wall is about fifteen feet above the stream. The river is deep and the current as it sweeps around the base of the wall is fearfully swift and strong, but it slides off and spreads out around the low sandy point at the foot of this street. I would not hesitate to risk it myself. Any swimmer with strength and nerve to fight clear of the walls for a few moments would only have to float down to that point and wade ashore."

Louise had grown very pale—except for a small red spot in the center of each cheek.

"You want me to take the file to him?" she said.

"No, indeed! If he has a file you will not know where he got it. When you go to see him next Wednesday, you can manage to intimate to him that he has friends outside who are working for him. Refer to the river and to the window and the sand point below. Tell him to examine carefully everything—every *book* that is sent to him. I must leave all this to your woman's wit, Miss Morliss, to evade the listening guard and get this information to him. You may not be able to do it in one visit—but you see—I must not go to the prison nor appear to have any interest or knowledge in the matter. That might ruin future plans. When he is sure of being ready for the attempt he will fasten a little square of white cloth, a piece of handkerchief or something else, not more than two or three inches square, to the outside of the sill of his window. It will be seen from the opposite side of the river. He will do this when he goes to his room after supper on the evening *before* the one on which he intends to make the escape. When he lands at the point in the night, he will come here to the house. You will receive him. After changing his clothes he will come straight to my rooms and tap at the side door. From that time he is in my charge, and I pledge you my honor, Miss Morliss, he shall be safe against all chances of arrest."

Jack had spoken very rapidly, with an intense eagerness that worked upon the girl's mind like a definite promise of success. To show that she had followed and understood him she slowly repeated the whole programme as he had stated it.

"Excellent," said Stelwyn, with a smile. "I shall manage to communicate with you—but without causing suspicion. Do all you safely can on Wednesday. Now, Miss Morliss, we have been conspiring here so long that I think I should say good-morning"—he took his hat and cane to go.

Louise also rose. She hesitated, and, with unusual timidity, held out her hand.

"Mr. Stelwyn," she said, with a little embarrassed laugh, "I am so bewildered by this—happiness—that—will you wait and let me try to thank you some other time?"

And Jack answered as he took her hand. "Miss Morliss, I shall owe you thanks for your help. Remember I am working to redeem myself in my own opinion, so far as I can."

They went slowly down the dark stairs and at the door Louise again shook hands with him.

And when Jack left the house he knew very positively that now there was a far stronger motive impelling him to success than any of which he had been conscious before.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE LOVE MOTIF APPEARS.

As soon as Stelwyn had left the house Louise ran quickly up the stairs and sat down in the window of the attic studio. She looked at the penitentiary, as Stelwyn had done, and tried to recall every word he had spoken—to make herself feel the reality of it all. These strange discoveries, the redemption of her father's name, his freedom, his fame and honor and happiness—all had come to her so swiftly that it was like the tangled whirl of a dream.

But no shadow of doubt or distrust entered her mind. She did not weigh Stelwyn's words to calculate his sincerity. The truth of Jack's heart had been in his voice and his bearing, and by the unconscious harmony of true heart answering to true heart she trusted him as she trusted herself. She did not know any influence from the personality of the man. In her thought he was only the embodiment of right power—strength and skill devoted to a just cause.

The only feeling which she would have acknowledged to herself had its beginning and end in the ever-present thought of her father. All else was subservient. If brought to the question she could have answered honestly that she believed her interest in Stelwyn to be only interest in the man who was working for her father's right. If a subtle under-current of feeling was drawing her toward Stelwyn's individuality, she was not conscious of its influence.

With the cheery optimism and enthusiasm which had been her father's best gift to her, she already felt assured of success. The *Deus ex Machina* who had dropped upon the stage had won her belief. A ripple of light laughter broke from her as she looked at those gloomy prison walls. Only a few weeks and her father would be free. Only a few months and his name would be restored to honor. Only a few more months and he would be on the high-road to fame.

Her fearless nature took but little account of the danger. She gloried in her father's strength and courage. The swift current of the river would have no terrors for him. He would take the plunge as lightly as a holiday swim.

As the reality of this new happiness grew upon her, there grew also a new tenderness toward her mother, a yearning pity for the mistaken one who so stubbornly refused to believe, who was blind to the truth that seemed so clear. The thought of her mother's isolation was the only cloud that dimmed the brightness of her hope. If she could but tell her mother all that had been discovered, if she could make her feel something of her own loving faith in the man who had been so wronged—if the two that she loved could once more love each other—then life would be life indeed. But she could no more have told her mother of Stelwyn's discoveries and plans than she could have told an official at the penitentiary. She would be as true as steel to the man who had trusted her, for her father's sake.

When at last she went down to the sitting-room Mrs. Morliss looked up carelessly from her book and said: "Your critic made quite a long stay, Louise," and then resumed her reading.

The girl was startled. She had altogether forgotten the paintings.

"Yes, mother," she said proudly, "he looked at every picture and seemed to be very much pleased. He says it is wonderful that father's work was not known and appreciated long ago. And, mother," she continued, exultantly, "he has bought two small pictures—for how much do you think?"

Mrs. Morliss raised her eyes for a moment and said indifferently, "I have no idea, Louise."

"For three hundred dollars, mother. What do you think of painting now? Two small pictures!"

Mrs. Morliss seemed about to speak, but only sighed and turned again to her book.

Louise dared still more. "Only think how proud and happy poor father will be!" she said.

Again Mrs. Morliss looked up—quickly this time—but bit her lips and was silent.

"He has worked so hard, for so many years," persisted the girl, "and with never a word of encouragement, and now at last the good time is coming. He will be famous. Don't you feel glad, mother?"

There was a sullen flash of anger in the wife's eyes, but it died out as she looked into the bright face of her daughter. She rose and laid down her book. For an instant she hesitated, then passed behind Louise's chair and laid her hand caressingly on the soft cheek that was upturned to her.

"I am very glad to see you so happy, dear," she said gently—then quickly withdrawing the hand that Louise strove to clasp she hurried from the room.

The girl followed her instantly, but Mrs. Morliss turned as if at bay, and said with some harshness, "Louise, I spoke just as I felt. I want you to be happy. I will try never to interfere with it, but please don't make me more unhappy than I am. I cannot listen if you talk about that subject."

"I am so sorry, mother!" said the girl quietly. "I will not talk about anything unpleasant to you. I only want you to be as happy as I am."

"I shall never be happy again, Louise. There, never mind, dear, dinner is nearly ready. We will set the table."

So ended the nearest approach to a reconciliation that had occurred since the arrest of John Morliss.

On Monday morning a small boy appeared at Mr. Garder's office with a note for Miss Morliss. Louise was busy at her ledger and Mr. Garder was in the outer office. The boy said there was no answer. She opened the note and read:

"**MY DEAR MISS MORLISS:**

"I inclose the check as we agreed and have sent to the house for the paintings.

"With renewed thanks,

"Very sincerely yours,

"JOHN G. STELWYN."

Inclosed was a check for \$300.00 to order of John Morliss.

Louise read the note carefully twice, and read every word and figure of the check. Her exultant joy at actually having this money to take to her father for the sale of two small pictures was a trifle marred by the brevity of Stelwyn's note to her. She had expected some reference to the great plan in which they were fellow-conspirators—some suggestion to her or some vague allusion to the matter. But she reflected that her chief was too wise to commit such things to a note delivered by an ordinary messenger. She would hear from him in due time. For the present she fully understood her

instructions. She folded the check and the note together and put them—in some safe nook of her garments, secured by a pin. She had a pocket-book, but she never trusted it with anything of importance.

She had just accomplished this transfer of values, when she was startled by the voice of Ralph Sconer. From her seat in the private office she could see Mr. Garder at the long table outside with a pile of books and papers before him, but she could not see the outer door.

She heard Ralph's voice say, "Could I speak with Miss Morliss for a moment?" She saw Mr. Garder turn and survey the speaker critically over his glasses. Then he said, "Certainly, sir! Sammy, show Mr. —; I beg your pardon?"

"Mr. Sconer," said Ralph.

"Sammy, show Mr. Sconer to the private office. He wishes to speak with Miss Morliss."

Louise, with some irritation, had wondered what new phase of Ralph's self-appointed guardianship this visit portended. But the momentary feeling had given place to a sentiment of kindly pity for the man who knew so much less than she—for the man who would so soon be forced to see his father justly confined in her father's unjust prison.

Ralph's real object in this call was to see the office in which Louise was at work, to learn by observation what her surroundings were and what possible dangers were to be guarded against. He had considered the matter in his leisure moments for several days and had hit upon an excuse in which he felt entire confidence. To show a friendly interest in her father's welfare would be sufficient to excuse anything to Louise, and Ralph was again conscious of heroic self-sacrifice, for he really believed John Morliss to be guilty not only of burglary but of betraying the confidence of his best friend.

Louise looked up from her work with a pleasant "Good morning, Ralph," and then waited, holding herself well in hand for what might come.

Ralph looked nervously about the room and out through the open door as if afraid of being overheard. Then he approached the table and leaned over it toward the girl.

"Louise," he said in a low voice, "I happened to be passing and called in just to ask a favor of you."

"What is it, Ralph?" asked the girl, hardly repressing her amusement at his solemnity.

"Louise, are you going to see your father on Wednesday?"

Louise was solemn now. "Certainly," she replied.

"I wanted to ask you if I might go with you. I want to see Mr. Morliss. I would not like him to think that his friends are forgetting him."

Poor Ralph! Just a little too late! Too slow in such matters! Business first, and—happiness at leisure! Two days ago such a proposal, blunt and crude as it is, would have been accepted joyfully and would have raised you many points in this young lady's estimation. Now it suffers sadly from contrast with something else.

There was a very tart reply on the tongue of Miss Morliss, but she checked and modified it. "We know his friends will not forget him, Ralph," she said. "I don't think it would be pleasant for you to go with me on next Wednesday. Perhaps some other time, later, things may be different."

Ralph's calculations had entirely failed. He had encountered the unexpected and was unready. He hesitated a moment, then returned to the lines of approach which he had so carefully studied. They must be right.

"Why can't I go with you this week, Louise?" he asked.

Of course the girl was irritated by this ill-timed persistence, but she answered with great sweetness:

"Because I do not think it best, Ralph." She was quickly forgetting her pity for this unfortunate unbeliever. He was too aggressive in his condescending kindness.

Even Ralph did not misunderstand the soft definiteness of her last words. He looked at the ceiling and at the floor, and once more returned to the attack.

"I don't understand why you are not willing to have me go with you, Louise. You know I have only the most friendly feeling toward your father. If you don't want me to see him—would you let me send something to him? Is there anything I could supply that would please him—in his—in the prison?"

Nagged almost beyond endurance, the girl had nearly said: "Yes, a good file," but instead of that there came to her a swift inspiration—doubtless from the devil. In connection with the file she remembered what Stelwyn had said about books, and she followed the first suggestion of a vague

plot to force Ralph to help her father, without his own knowledge.

"There is not much that can be sent, Ralph," she said. "You know he is very fond of reading. You might send him some books."

The answer was just what she expected. "I will send some, Louise. Do you know what he would like?"

"I don't think of any particular work," Louise replied slowly. "You know his tastes. If you can pick out a few and send them here, Ralph, I will select those that I think would please him."

"I will bring some books here to-morrow," said Ralph, glad of the excuse for another call. He hesitated for a moment and said:

"Do you find it pleasant here, Louise?"

"Very pleasant, indeed. I like Mr. Garder; and Sammy is a jewel."

"Who's Sammy?" said Ralph.

But at this moment Stelwyn's cheery voice sounded in the outer office.

"Garder, old man, can you drop those papers and talk to me for a moment?"

Ralph involuntarily looked toward the door, and Louise was glad that he did not look at her for the moment.

"Presently, presently, Jack," said Mr. Garder. Then he looked up and added, with a somewhat malicious smile: "Sit down in the office, Jack, I'll be with you in a moment."

So Jack walked to the door of the private office, paused for one quick glance from the threshold, and then, with a politely indifferent bow to Louise and a politely indifferent stare at Ralph, seated himself and picked up a newspaper from the table.

"I must be going, Louise," said Ralph, hastily. "I will see you again to-morrow. Good-morning," and with one look at Stelwyn, quickly turned aside by the steady blue eyes that it encountered, Ralph left the office.

Stelwyn folded his newspaper thoughtfully and looked at Louise.

"Miss Morliss," he said, "wasn't that Mr. Ralph Sconer?"

Louise had felt a certain embarrassment at having Stelwyn see her in conversation with Ralph. She could not have explained the cause of such a feeling, but she was sorry that

it had occurred, and Ralph had to bear the brunt of her displeasure. It was clearly his fault. But she felt that there was something to be rectified by her.

"Yes, Mr. Stelwyn," she said. "Mr. Sconer is going to bring some books here to-morrow to send to father."

She said it very innocently, but her eyes could never lie, and Jack was looking at them as she spoke. He did not miss their meaning, and she was suddenly ashamed of that devil's suggestion which she had harbored and which by a word and a look she had confessed. She was proud of her conspiracy with Stelwyn for the relief of her father, and as she regarded him as the chief of that conspiracy so she was conscious of desiring his approval. The little trick upon Ralph was a clever scheme to get the files to her father without involving the conspirators, and should have been commended by her chief, and yet, for some occult reason, she was ashamed of it, and for some still less explainable cause, she now hoped that Stelwyn would not approve it.

Jack seemed to be studying the situation. For a few moments he looked at the wall without speaking. Then, not turning his eyes toward Louise, he said:

"That is kind of Mr. Sconer, to think of sending books to your father. If I come in to-morrow, may I look at them? Because you know I had thought of sending some myself, but would not like to select the same ones."

She knew what he meant. He had understood her too well. He was accepting the opportunity which she had offered him—to handle those books which were to be sent by Ralph. She would not have him believe her guilty of treachery, to anyone. She could not be treacherous—even for the great cause.

"I will tell you what books Mr. Sconer sends, Mr. Stelwyn," she said. She hesitated and as Jack looked at her the frank, honest nature of the girl asserted itself. She smiled as she said, "Ralph means only kindness, and though he is very irritating sometimes, I would prefer not to take advantage of his generosity. I think you should not use those books, Mr. Stelwyn.

And Jack answered with an answering smile, "I promise you, Miss Morliss, that I will not come near the office while *the books are here.*"

*He was glad that she would not consent to the trick which*

she had herself suggested, but he was many times more glad to feel from her words and manner that Ralph Sconer had no abiding place in her heart.

"Do you remember all your duties for Wednesday?" he asked.

"I remember every word of the instructions," she said. "Is there anything new?"

"Nothing whatever, as yet," said Stelwyn. "We will follow the lines agreed on."

"I will do everything you have told me—and I shall manage to do it all on Wednesday. After that day father will only be waiting for the——."

"He won't have to wait long, Miss Morliss. Some one of his friends will supply him with the necessaries." Jack looked at the girl with a smile as he added: "You remember that you were not to know where the necessaries come from."

"I will try not to know, then," she said.

Jack laughed. "I will try to help you not to know," he said, "and I assure you, Miss Morliss, that whatever you may think you know about that little matter you will be mistaken."

This nettled Louise a trifle. She did not like to feel that Stelwyn would not trust her even with this detail.

"Why don't you want me to know about that part?" she said.

And Jack answered quickly, just as Louise had answered Ralph.

"Because I do not think it best that you should know"—but he added at once: "Miss Morliss, if anyone should ask you how your father obtained a file you should say, 'I do not know'"—Jack stopped for an instant and seemed to hesitate. Then he continued, as he looked at Louise—"and if you cannot say that truthfully, you will be suspected at once."

For a moment the girl was in doubt whether to appear angry or not. She was not angry—she was pleased.

"So you think a woman doesn't know how to tell a good lie," she said at length.

"Pardon me," said Jack with a smile. "I didn't make any *general* statement like that."

The conversation was headed toward the dangerous ground of personalities. At this point it met with timely interruption. Mr. Garder, making pencil notes of reference

from the pile of volumes before him, suddenly remembered Stelwyn's arrival. Sammy was close behind his employer, on the window seat, also with a book. Sammy knew that when Mr. Garder was looking up precedents he was no more dangerous than when he was in court.

"Hulloa, Jack!" sang out the lawyer. "I forgot all about you. Why didn't you call me?" and he rose leisurely and began to gather up his papers.

Jack looked at Louise, and the girl for the first time failed to meet his glance. He was about to confess that he hadn't any business with Garder—that he had come only to see her; but something in her manner restrained him.

He turned lazily toward the door as Garder appeared with his bundle of papers. "Old man," he said, "if you neglect all your clients as you do me you'll have to go out of business. Come, now"—he looked at his watch—"it's twelve o'clock. Put on your hat and come to the club with me. I'll tell you what I want before you can finish your soup."

Stelwyn stood up with hat in hand, and Mr. Garder, after a hesitating glance at the table, surrendered, and prepared to go.

"Good morning, Miss Morliss," said Jack. "I will bring you that book on Thursday."

Louise looked up quickly, but as Mr. Garder had his eyes upon her she instantly found her equilibrium.

"Thank you very much, Mr. Stelwyn," she said. "Good morning," and Mr. Garder and Jack departed.

In their brief conversation neither Stelwyn nor Louise had referred to the paintings or to the three-hundred-dollar check. And the reason was—they had both forgotten.

But however unwilling Jack was to have Louise play tricks upon her friends, he had no such compunctions as regarded his own actions. He had resolved to get the files into those very books of Ralph's—and to do it without letting Miss Morliss suspect it. He was studying the problem as he walked along with the lawyer.

"What did you want to see me about, Jack?" asked Mr. Garder.

"Nothing whatever," answered Jack.

"I thought as much. Glad you are willing to confess it. *But why the devil did you drag me out here?*"

"Just to buy you a good lunch."

They walked in silence for some moments.

"Jack," said Garder, "you like my little assistant pretty well, don't you?"

"No!" said Jack.

Something in his voice startled the old man. He turned and faced his young client.

"Eh!" he said. "What might you mean by that?"

"Just what I said, Garder."

"You don't like her?"

"No!"

"What then?"

"I love her, old man," said Jack, with somewhat unnecessary fierceness. "And I'm going to try and persuade her to love me—some time."

"And then?"

"Then! you old idiot—then there'll be a properly decorous and quiet wedding in some peaceful, vine-clad country church—and all that. And possibly you'll be asked to attend as a witness."

They had reached the entrance to the club. Garder stopped and turned toward his companion. "On the whole, Jack, I think I like you," he said, critically.

"Thank you," said Jack, airily.

"Jack—are you sure of yourself?"

"Dead sure, old man."

"She is a true and noble woman," said the lawyer, musingly. "I have learned to love her, too. Don't be startled, boy. I'm not a fool. But—Jack—what about her father?"

Jack laughed. "Leave that to me, Garder," he said, "and whatever you may see or hear in the near future—you haven't seen or heard it—do you understand? When I call on you to help me, rattle up your vast resources of legal information and make a big fight—to a finish. Her father is an innocent man, and before we get through he shall be proclaimed such—by the courts and the public."

"Go ahead, Jack, I will help your fight—more gladly now than before," and together they passed into the club house.

## CHAPTER XVI

### WORKING AND WAITING

On Saturday morning Stelwyn had purchased two dozen short files of the best manufacture and of assorted shapes. He had spent several hours in his library Saturday afternoon experimenting with different styles of books and different shapes of files. He discovered, as anticipated, that in many books a short flat file could be inserted in the back of the cover between the binding and the backing and secured by the turned-in edges of the cover in such a way that only a very careful examination would detect it. It added a little stiffness to the opening of the volume—not at all unusual to new or cheaply bound books. He wrapped a half dozen of these flat files separately in thin paper, gumming the edges, and put them in his pocket for an opportunity.

As a result of his reflections about the books which Ralph Sconer was to send to Mr. Morliss, he left the club soon after lunch, and walked to the principal book store in the town. He felt reasonably sure that Ralph would go there to select his books.

Jack was a constant patron of this establishment and was well-known to all the salesmen.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Stelwyn," said the first man he approached. "What is it to-day, sir?"

"I'm not quite sure what I want," said Jack. "Do you know a gentleman named Sconer—Ralph Sconer?"

"He was here this morning, sir, and left an order for some books to be sent to his office. I waited on him myself."

"Ah! that's just it," said Jack. "Could you tell me what books he ordered—because I happen to know that he intends them for a present, and as I want to send some books to the same man, I don't want to duplicate his."

"Why, he was in a hurry, Mr. Stelwyn, and simply asked *me* to select a half dozen of the latest books of travel and *send them to his office for approval*."

Stelwyn considered the matter for a moment. He did not believe that Ralph knew or cared much about books. His leaving the selection to a salesman was pretty good evidence of that fact. He thought it probable that Ralph would not look at the books when he got them. They would be taken to Louise unopened.

"Have you picked out any books yet, Mr. Brown?" he asked.

"Not yet, sir. He asked to have them delivered to-morrow morning."

"Then suppose you let me help you make the selection—and at the same time I can be looking for some for myself."

"I shall be very glad to have your advice, Mr. Stelwyn. If you will take a chair I will bring the books for you to examine."

"Very well," said Jack, but instead of sitting down he strolled slowly along the book-shelves and stopped in front of the window with his back to the store.

Presently Mr. Brown appeared with three volumes.

"These are quite recent, Mr. Stelwyn," he said, "and have been very highly commended. They are having a big sale. Have you seen them before?"

"No, I believe not," said Jack carelessly, as he picked up one of the books and began to examine it.

"While you are looking at these, Mr. Stelwyn, I will hunt up some more," said the salesman.

This was what Jack expected and wanted. As soon as Mr. Brown had turned Stelwyn was very much interested in the binding of the books, and before the salesman brought a second lot, there was a flat file neatly concealed in the back of each one of the three volumes. The same process was repeated with two of the next lot. The third one Jack decided was already in the library of the gentleman to whom they were to be sent. The file wouldn't go in.

In half an hour six works had been selected for Ralph, and they all contained something more than author or publisher had intended. Then Stelwyn purchased six more, which he ordered sent to his rooms.

"And by the way, Mr. Brown," he said as he left the store. "Do me a favor, can you? I have a reason for wanting to get my present in ahead of Mr. Sconer's. Make some excuse to delay delivering his books until to-morrow afternoon."

"I think I can manage that, Mr. Stelwyn. Simply a misunderstanding of his instructions," said the clerk, with a smile.

"Exactly," replied Stelwyn. "And of course you will not mention my name under any circumstances."

"Certainly not, sir. Good-day!"

Jack chuckled to himself as he walked away. It had worked perfectly so far. He had asked the salesman to delay sending the books, because he did not wish Louise to take them to the prison—and if sent to Sconer's office Tuesday afternoon, he would probably fail to get them to Louise in time for her Wednesday visit. If he did manage to send them to her, she would have no time to examine them. He hoped that if Louise did take them she would pass them as coming from Ralph Sconer.

The matter began to worry him. Possibly he had not been so smart after all. Louise must not deliver those books herself. If discoveries were made later, they would be traced at once to her. Obeying the impulse of this new idea he walked back to Mr. Garder's office.

But Louise had unintentionally saved him from the apprehended danger. After Mr. Garder and Stelwyn had gone, she began to review the situation, and realized very distinctly that she did not want to see Ralph Sconer, nor Ralph Sconer's books on the morrow. She therefore composed a little note:

"My Dear Ralph:

"I find I shall be very busy to-morrow and shall have several things to take with me on Wednesday. If you wish to send any books, can you have them delivered direct? You know what would be pleasing, as well as I, and I am afraid I could not look at them to-morrow." She was about to subscribe herself "Very sincerely yours," and then she hesitated and looked at the letter she had written. "Oh! nonsense!" she said, and wrote, "Your's truly, Louise Morliss." She gave the note to Sammy to deliver, with instructions to wait for an answer—and she decided to wait in the office herself without luncheon. Those horrible books were becoming oppressive.

*Sammy returned in an hour and a quarter, very much out of breath, as if he had been running all of both ways. Col-dart & Goolie's office was only five blocks distant.*

"My Dear Louise," Ralph wrote, "I have selected some very interesting books of travel that I know will be pleasing. They are to be sent here to-morrow, and I will forward them direct. Since you are so busy I need not ask you to look at them. I will call in and see you later in the week."

"Very truly yours,"

The reader may perhaps be able to determine which of these two notes contained the largest real lies. This record has nothing to do with the problem.

When Stelwyn appeared at three o'clock he was hailed by Sammy from the window seat: "Mr. Garder ain't come back yet, Mr. Stelwyn."

"Never mind, Sammy," said Jack; "I can leave word with Miss Morliss."

He walked into the private office and was greeted by a surprised look from Louise—for which he was prepared, and which consequently did not disturb him.

"Miss Morliss," he said, coming to the point at once, "about those books which Mr. Sconer is going to send"—he stopped for a moment.

Now, if Louise had been a man she would probably have said, "Oh! damn those books!" It is not unlikely that she thought something that was the equivalent of that manly expression. As it was, suspecting that Stelwyn still longed to get hold of those particular volumes she enjoyed saying: "I have just received a note from Mr. Sconer. He has already selected the books and is going to have them delivered direct. He will not send them here at all."

She remembered Jack's face afterward, and could never quite explain to herself why it showed such a quick smile of satisfaction—almost a grin.

"Oh!" he said, in a moment. "So he has selected them already. Well, no matter; I'm rather glad of it. Aren't you?"

"Yes, indeed, I am," replied Louise.

"I shall not come in to-morrow," said Jack, as he rose to go. "Of course, Miss Morliss, it will not do to have Garder or anyone else suspect our plans. When all is well we can afford to own up—but not yet. I will try to see you again on Thursday. Will you have some news for me?"

"Surely some news, Mr. Stelwyn. I hope the best."

"The best will be that your father fully understands the matter, and is willing to make the attempt."

"Never fear for him," said the girl, proudly.

After Jack had gone, Sammy sauntered leisurely up to the door of the private office.

"Say! Miss Morliss!" he remarked.

"What is it, Sammy boy?" said Louise.

"Does yer think Mr. Stelwyn hates spiders as bad as yous?"

Louise laughed. What had the imp thought of now?

"Why, Sammy?" she asked.

"Well! 'Cause when the spiders was prevalent he didn't used to come more nor twice a month, and now sence me and you's cleaned 'em out he comes twicet a day." After which suggestion for a syllogism, the boy grinned as if much pleased with himself, and retired without waiting to be shown the fallacy of his reasoning.

Wednesday was a white day for John Morliss and for his daughter. The prisoner listened, as a thirsty man drinks cold water, to the story of the stranger's interest in his paintings, the visit to his attic studio, the appreciative criticism of each picture, and the final purchase of two. Louise did not mention the name of the buyer, nor did she show the check. The guard was within hearing distance, and Stelwyn's name must not appear. To her father's inquiry she avoided a direct reply, at the same time touching her lips with her finger. The old man understood the movement, and still better the look that accompanied it.

He was at once on the alert for some secret information, and with this understanding established it was not hard to convey to him, bit by bit, all that was proposed and all that was expected of him. The hardest part of Louise's task was to prevent her father from showing too visibly his quick apprehension of her vague and guarded words, dropped here and there in the midst of commonplace conversation as the opportunity offered.

But when she left the prison her mission was fully accomplished, and her father, with twenty years suddenly lifted from him, felt again all the intense earnestness of his young manhood. Hope long deferred had at last come to make *glad the sick heart*, and the man who had struggled after a *will o' the wisp* ideal until it had led him to the gulf of

despair, suddenly saw the gulf bridged and the ideal separated from him only by a few brave steps.

His daughter was not wrong in her estimate of the effect of her message. The despondent, half broken-hearted John Morliss was at once capable of any daring, any suffering, that might be necessary to reach the prize which now for the first time assumed the definiteness of reality. Not one word of the instructions which Stelwyn had given, Louise failed of delivery, and not one word failed of ready comprehension and sure remembrance. Only the name of the helper was kept from him. Louise did not need to use Stelwyn's check. She had looked at it several times on Tuesday, and she still kept it pinned to the note which had accompanied it. The fact that it had been made out to her father in payment for two of his pictures was sufficient for his and her glory. The money—well, she could always get it when necessary—and for the present, she liked to keep the check. And Morliss had the same faith in his daughter that she had in her father. If she did not tell him who was his rescuer, it was for some good reason. He would learn in due time. Of course Ralph Sconer was his first thought, but he at once dismissed the idea. Ralph might help him to escape, but Ralph could never appreciate his paintings.

Louise assumed a duty beyond the definite instructions—in telling her father that he must not let her know how he should obtain the file, and she did this because of a feeling that it would please Stelwyn. She wished to show her fellow-conspirator that she could be superior to the curiosity commonly attributed to her sex.

On Thursday morning Stelwyn appeared at Mr. Garder's.

"Miss Morliss is in the private office with Mr. Garder," said the boy.

"Thank you, Sammy," said Jack. "Here's a medal for your information."

Jack was rather pleased at the boy's shrewdness. So long as no one suspected his plans for the father he was not averse to betraying his interest in the daughter.

"Garder," he said, as he entered the office, "don't disturb yourself. I only came in to bring this book to Miss Morliss. It is that little description of Mexican life and scenery of which we were speaking. Miss Morliss," he continued, as he handed the book to Louise, "it is quite well written, and

I can vouch for the truth of it, for I know Mexico pretty well."

"What about your interests down there, Jack?" said Garder.

"I'm afraid they're suffering," replied Stelwyn. "The reports I receive are very unpleasant. Bad management—afraid I made a mistake in my agent. I shall probably have to run down there in a few weeks and straighten things out."

Louise had taken the book without at all knowing why he had brought it to her—but assuming it was only an excuse to call and hear her report. She turned over the pages carelessly, wondering how Stelwyn would manage to get rid of Mr. Garder.

She was surprised and gratified when Mr. Garder looked at his watch and said: "Great Caesar! It's nearly ten o'clock, and I must be in court. Jack, will you excuse me? Are you going down town?"

"Not for a moment, old man," said Stelwyn. "Your chairs are fairly comfortable, and I'm weary. Court has no interest for me." It occurred to him to add—"at least not your kind of court"—but he did not say it.

"Mr. Stelwyn," said Louise, when Garder was gone, "why in the world did you bring me this book about Mexico?"

"I don't really know why that special book, Miss Morliss; but I think you will be pleased with it. Of course, I needed some justification for my visit. Now please tell me the news."

Louise looked into the outer office to assure herself of the situation of Sammy, and then related all that had passed at the prison, and Stelwyn listened with the calm attention of a superior officer receiving a report from his subordinate. He compelled himself not to look at the girl as she told the story—for he wanted all his strength of thought to bear upon her words, and he had already learned that to meet her eyes made him suddenly weak.

When all was told he turned to her, and at his first glance she looked down. She was conscious of having done well. She was proud of her success. She knew that she longed for his approval—and, yet, in that first look of his she read such approval that she was disconcerted and embarrassed for the moment. And so Jack had the advantage.

"You have succeeded wonderfully, Miss Morliss," he said, easily. "I knew you would make no failure; but you have accomplished everything at one visit. There is nothing more to be done but to wait for the signal."

Louise looked up with a smile. "I told father," she said, "that he was on no account to let me know how he secured a file. I might betray it."

There was a trace of mischievousness in Stelwyn's eyes as he answered: "Then of course Mr. Morliss did not tell you that he already had a file?"

"Mr. Stelwyn!" she said. "You surely don't mean—but no—father could not conceal anything from me. That is too absurd."

"Granted!" said Jack. "Still I think he has the file—only perhaps he hasn't found it yet. Don't you hope he will find it and use it so vigorously that you won't have to go to that place again?"

"I wish I could use it for him," Louise answered, quickly, and as Stelwyn looked at the flashing eyes and the little hand that nervously grasped a pen-holder, he was conscious of a feeling of jealousy—jealousy of the all-absorbing love of this girl for her old father. He tried to stifle the unworthy sentiment.

In a moment Louise continued:

"Do you think it possible, Mr. Stelwyn, that father can do that in a week—before I go again next Wednesday?"

"Hardly possible," said Jack; "but I shall be on the watch every evening—and within an hour after the little white flag appears, you will know of it—so that you may make all preparations."

The girl drew a long breath of excitement.

"Oh that little white flag!" she said. "How I wish I could see it, too!"

For a moment Jack was sorely tempted—to assure her that she should see it—to defy everything and take her with him each evening to his post of observation. She would go unhesitatingly. He knew it. But better judgment prevailed.

"I wish you could be there, Miss Morliss," he said; "but that might be a confession of our conspiracy—and we are not ready for that yet—are we?"

"No, indeed!" said Louise. "I didn't mean what I said,

Mr. Stelwyn. I promise not to act like a foolish woman—if I do talk so."

"You shall see your father on the next night after the signal, Miss Morliss, and then you will need all your bravery and coolness."

Jack did not then know how great must be the bravery and coolness which that night would demand of this young girl.

From the lawyer's ofice Stelwyn went to the club, played a few games of billiards, and incidentally remarked to his acquaintances that he was annoyed by news from his Mexican investment. Most of Jack's friends knew that he was interested in something of some kind down in Mexico, but few had ever taken the trouble to inquire exactly what it was. They all had troubles of their own, so they carelessly commiserated him with more or less of sarcasm, at the prospect of a trip South just as the warm weather was beginning, and Jack took it all in good humor, for it was what he wanted.

After lunch he walked to the stables where his horses were kept, within half a block of his rooms.

"Jimmy," he said, "I haven't ridden Poker for more than two weeks. Have you kept him in good shape?"

"He's all right, Mr. Stelwyn," said the horseman. "I give him a little run every day; but he needs more, sir. I think he's pinin' to feel your weight, sir."

"I'll give him a chance," said Jack, as he walked into the stall and patted the black horse. "Poker, old fel', did you get lonesome? Well, I won't forget you any more. Jimmy," he continued, "I'm going to ride every evening for a few weeks. I need the exercise, and so does Poker. Bring him round to the door at half-past five to-night."

Stelwyn's black Morgan was nearly as well known as Stelwyn himself, and as they went down the street *together*—not separated by any intermittent views of scenery between them—a good rider on a good horse—those who saw them felt pleased. Harmony is always pleasing.

Stelwyn rode down through the city, and crossing the long swing bridge, followed the drive up the east bank of the river. The ground on the east side was somewhat higher than the city, and the road as it wound along the stream toward the south was a gradual ascent.

Opposite the penitentiary Jack checked his horse and looked about. A growth of trees and bushes covered the slope of the bank to the river, about two hundred feet below.

He turned Poker's head toward the bank and urged him gently forward. The horse snorted and hesitated, but a kindly word and a friendly touch on the neck induced him to proceed. Jack guided him zig-zagging slowly down the bank until they were twenty feet below the level of the road; then, as a good vista opened, he halted and took out a powerful field glass. The horse stood motionless while for five minutes Stelwyn carefully studied the whole east front of the penitentiary. From this point of vantage he could look down over the parapet wall and the roofs of the out-houses built against its inner side, and could see most of the ground of the narrow court between these out-houses and the prison proper.

He saw one of the guards pacing back and forth in the court. Suddenly the prison bell clanged, and in a few moments a compact body of prisoners marched along the court and disappeared in the dark entrance of the main building.

"Six o'clock," said Stelwyn. "They're going to supper. About half past six should be our signal time." He leveled his glasses at the second-story windows and counted to the seventh window from the north end.

"That's the one," he said; "but I never thought of this miserable west sun. Poker, we must go lower."

A hundred feet further down the bank he found another vista, and now the sun was behind the building. With the glasses he could plainly distinguish each vertical bar in front of the window. It seemed as if he could detect the streaks and spots of rust.

"Poker, my boy," he said, as he put up the glasses, "we're all right. We'll know when the white flag flies, if its no bigger than a postage stamp."

He rode up the bank and cantered down the road and back through the town up to Norden Street, down to the foot of the street to inspect the sandy point, and then, as he felt that Poker must be weary, he compelled him to walk slowly up Norden Street and past the Morliss cottage, after which he went to the stable at a clattering gait.

*And thenceforward Poker and his master took that trip*

up the east bank of the river every afternoon, and Poker soon learned that at a particular point in the road he was to climb down through the bushes to the same spot every night, and there to wait patiently until ordered to climb back again.

The lengthening days of approaching summer seemed unnaturally long both to Jack and to Louise. Louise was impatient to see her father free, and Jack was impatient to free the father of Louise. The preponderance of impatience is undetermined.

Stelwyn dropped in at Mr. Garder's office nearly every day, and without any apparent cause. Garder knew that he came because he was in love with Louise. Louise knew that he came because he was working with her for her father, and because he felt that she would like to know even that there was no news. Sammy knew nothing whatever about the matter, but had his youthful opinions.

On Saturday night Mr. Slick made a brief report to Stelwyn. By careful inquiry he had ascertained that on the night of February 14th the schooner "Sally" had been moored to the wharf at the foot of Spring Street. As the "Sally" was again in port, he had learned, by his own peculiar methods, that one of the deck-hands remembered seeing a man on the night of February 14th, walking along the wharf at about one o'clock. A few moments later the deck-hand had heard a single shot fired somewhere up the street. This served to corroborate the statement of John Morliss, and was excellent—so far as it went.

But Jack's independent line of work was absorbing his interest for the present, and he dismissed the detective with a few complimentary remarks and a request to keep pegging away until he felt satisfied that the case against Sconer was fully established.

## CHAPTER XVII

### ONE ADVANTAGE IN HAVING A NEGRO SERVANT

"Cole," said Stelwyn, as he sat at his eleven o'clock breakfast on Sunday morning, "tell your family and friends that you are going to Mexico with me in a week or so, to stay several days."

"Wha's dat! Mas'r Jack?" said the old servant, nearly dropping his tray in astonishment. "Yoe goin' to take old Cole down in dat turb'l country?"

"What did I say, you black idiot?" answered Stelwyn. "Now pay attention. What did I say?"

"Yoe *sade*, Mas'r Jack," replied the negro, scratching his gray wool with one hand while he balanced the tray on the other—"yoe *sade* ah was to tell mah family ah was goin' to Mexico wif Mas'r Jack."

"Well, that's right. Did I say you were going to Mexico?"

Jack enjoyed the perplexed expression of his old servant's face as he looked at the tray, at the table, and everywhere except at his employer. In a few minutes Colon said, with a certain defiance:

"Mas'r Jack, don' yoe fool yoe old uncle. Ah'll go to Mexico, or anywhere, wif yoe. What ole Cole wants to know is, is he goin'?"

"No, daddy," said Jack, "you're not going; but you are to make people think you're going. Can you get that through your thick skull? I'm going to Mexico, and you're to tell people that you're going with me, and when I have gone they'll believe that you've gone, too. But you're not going. You're to stay right here."

Colon looked at his master with a stare of bewilderment. If the hour had been midnight, the old negro would have prepared to put Stelwyn comfortably to bed. He would have been sure that champagne was the cause of this extraordinary talk.

"Mas'r Jack," he said, at length, "how's de people gwine to believe ah'se gone to Mexico when dey'se lookin' right at me?"

"But they won't be looking at you. If you let anyone get a sight of your ugly face, I'll break your thick head when I get back."

This passed Colon's comprehension. He chuckled nervously for a moment, and then only said: "Yaas, Mas'r Jack."

"Now, Cole," said Stelwyn, solemnly, "Stand there and listen to me very carefully. You are to do exactly as I tell you, and if you miss one word of my orders, or disobey one word, you'll get a broken head, and—worse than that, daddy—you'll bring me into very serious trouble, and perhaps have me arrested and locked up in prison for life."

Jack waited a moment to give time for the old servant to fully comprehend this terrific threat. Colon set down his tray with shaking hands, and was almost pale as he said;

"Foh de Lawd, Mas'r Jack, whatever yoe's gwine to do—don' do it, don' do it, Mas'r Jack! If yoe was to get 'rested, Mas'r Jack, old Cole 'd just natchly die of sheer mossification."

"Well, Cole," continued Stelwyn, enjoying the effect he had produced, "that's just what will surely happen if you don't do exactly as I tell you. Now, will you listen?"

"Ah'm a' listenin' hahd, Mas'r Jack."

"You are to tell your wife that I am expecting to go to Mexico on business in a week or two—I can't tell exactly when until I receive some letters or telegrams. You are to tell her that when I go you must go with me. You will tell her that you must be away for at least a week, and before you go you will leave some money with her for expenses while you are away. You will pack your little gripsack with such things as you need for a week and bring it here, because I may have to go suddenly, and I shall take the train that passes through Compos at four o'clock in the morning. Do you understand all that?"

"Yaas, Mas'r Jack," said the negro, nodding his head vigorously and looking intently at his master.

"Very good. Now listen again. You are to tell Jimmy, the coachman, the same thing that you tell your wife, and *you are also to tell Peter, the head janitor of this building, the same thing.* You are not to mention it to anyone except

to these three—your wife, Jimmy, and Peter. If anyone else asks you about it you can say that you are going to Mexico with me, but you don't know how soon or for how long. Have you got all that in your head?"

"Yaas, Mas'r Jack."

"Now, keep that separate. That's all you are to say to people. What I am going to tell you now is not to be mentioned or breathed to your wife or to anyone else—remember, not to *anyone*. While I am in Mexico these rooms will be locked up from the outside. Every window and every curtain and every shade will be closed, and you'll be here in these rooms and never move out of them or look out of the window or show the slightest sign of yourself until I return. If people come to the door, they may ring or pound all day long—you pay no attention. You will not light a single light nor a single fire, nor even scratch a match while I am gone, and you will go about the rooms without your shoes, and as still as a cat. If anyone finds out that you are here, I shall be arrested and locked up, and you will get a broken head, if you don't get hung."

The poor old servant was now in a pitiable state of befogment. He looked at Stelwyn, scratched his head, then put the tips of his fingers together and separated them one by one, nodding his head and whispering a word to each finger. At last he said:

"Mas'r Jack, 'pears lak mah hearin' ain't ve'y good no moe. Would yoe please say all dose constructions again, Mas'r Jack."

Stelwyn knew that this specimen of the old-time devoted slave could be trusted to any point where his master's honor or safety was concerned. He knew that Colon was shrewd and cunning, and that with full understanding of what was required of him there would be no danger of betrayal or failure from him. So, after abusing him roundly, Jack repeated all that he had already told him.

"Mas'r Jack," said Colon, after some reflection, "you don' wan' to stahve ole Cole. Ah couldn't live a week in dese rooms wid nuffin' to eat."

"You have a great, thick head, daddy," said Jack. "I think you begin to understand. Now, I'll tell you a little more. To-morrow you're to buy all the eatables you want—*cold stuff*, you know; crackers and cheese, and canned

chicken, and all that sort of truck—and store it in here. And you can get some beer—I know you never drink too much—and anything else you think of. But remember, you cannot have a fire or a light; so select things that don't need cooking. You can sleep in my bed and amuse yourself with the books, but you can't touch the piano or the violin. Remember, not a sound must be heard. You're in Mexico all the time, and there's no one in the rooms. Do you understand all this?"

The servant's face had slowly assumed a more and more pleased expression, which at last developed into a good-sized grin, as he answered: "Shoely, shoely, Mas'r Jack; yoe old uncle knows how to fool 'em all. Huh! huh! But, Mas'r Jack," he continued, suddenly becoming grave and mysterious, "what'll Jimmy think when he sees ah don' go to de train wif you?"

"Never mind Jimmy, Cole. You do as you're told. Before I go you'll know more about it all, and you must help me, old daddy—you must help me every way you can, because, Cole"—Jack sighed as he rose from the table—"this means all the world to me."

"Ah'll help yoe, Mas'r Jack," said the servant, earnestly. "Ole Cole doan' go back on Mas'r Jack—not while he's on dis yere arth. Ah'll do just what yoe done tole me, Mas'r Jack, and a heap more dan yoe tole me, when yoe tells me what."

"You shall know everything in good time, uncle," said Jack. "Be sure you remember what I've told you already."

On Sunday afternoon Stelwyn and Poker started two hours earlier than usual, and as their first course unfortunately led them up to Norden Street, Poker was compelled to do some very hard work for the two hours thereafter. Jack had seen Ralph Sconer going up the steps at the Morliss house. Poker was not conscious of wrongdoing, and Jack was not conscious of punishing him, but nevertheless Poker was made to suffer for twenty miles. At the end of this hard run Jack was calm and Poker was tired, and they went leisurely to their point of observation.

If Stelwyn had been permitted to follow Ralph into the Morliss cottage and hear the conversation, Poker at least would have been the gainer.

*Ralph had not found time to call at Mr. Garder's office.*

to see Louise, but with the knowledge that he had done his duty to her, to her father, and to the firm that relied upon him, he felt that on Sunday afternoon he might legitimately spend an hour in the company of the young lady whom he expected to marry as soon as his position would justify such an enterprise.

Ralph was undoubtedly correct in his estimate of his duties, but the young lady had never been much interested in Ralph's duties, and she was exceptionally uninterested in Ralph on this Sunday. The fact that she had happened to see Stelwyn ride by, just as Ralph rang the bell, may possibly have added an unconscious flavor to her greeting of her older friend. Whatever the cause may have been, Ralph was far from happy during his short call, and an analysis of his thoughts and feelings would have shown that the prominent source of his unhappiness was his inability to understand why he was not received as the most welcome of guests. He knew that he ought to be so received. He knew Louise thoroughly (so he thought), but the actual reception was so vastly different from the expected that he was really annoyed and distressed. He felt vaguely that some unknown force was working against him—some trifling factor had been neglected in his calculations—and he was chiefly grieved because he could not eliminate nor even locate that persistent cause of error.

He told Louise of the books which he had selected and sent to her father. Fortunately for him, Louise did not show enough interest to ask what books they were. She only said she had no doubt that her father would find them pleasant reading, and while Ralph described how he had been obliged to write a note to the warden, asking him to permit these books to be used by the prisoner, John Morliss, and how the warden had replied, assuring him that Mr. Morliss should have the books at once, Louise seemed to be thinking of something far away from the subject.

Oh, Ralph! If you had only known that she was wondering how Stelwyn had managed to get *his* books delivered; if you had only known—in short, if Louise and Jack and Ralph had all known all that each knew, then it is highly probable that the result would have been the same.

Ralph's visit lasted only half an hour, and for the remainder of the afternoon Louise sat with a book near the

front window. She was not deeply interested in the book, for she looked up at every sound on the street. We may dare to state what she would have blushed to acknowledge even to herself—in sober truth, she was looking for a black horse and a handsome rider.

On Thursday morning the conspirators were both happy. Louise reported with undisguised delight that her father had made such progress with his files that in a few days the signal would be given—that he had already arranged his plan of reaching the pavement of the court and scaling the parapet wall on the river bank. If all went well, the first dark night after the signal would find him a free man, “and then, Mr. Stelwyn,” the girl continued, in her excitement, “we must rely on you,” after which statement she became suddenly confused under Jack’s look, and added, “as we have relied on you from the first.”

And Mr. Stelwyn, being well pleased with the report, and very well pleased with the final words and the manner that accompanied them, answered: “Miss Morliss, you can rely upon me to the end—of everything.”

At this point Sammy created a diversion by sauntering up to the door and remarking:

“Say, Miss Morliss, be them deeds copied? ‘Cause Mr. Garder said I was to take ‘em down at half-past ten.”

Jack looked at Louise with the beginning of a smile, but no answering look greeted him. Miss Morliss was evidently annoyed. Whereupon Jack picked up the largest bundle of documents from the table, balanced it in his hand for an instant, and then, with the remark, “Thy deeds upon thy head, Sammy,” launched the heavy package at the grinning boy with the force and aim of a pitcher throwing to first base.

But Sammy was no first-baseman. The solid weight of papers struck him fairly on the ribs, and he went backward to the floor with a wild reaching of arms and legs. Louise sprang up with a slight exclamation that was partly of laughter and partly of alarm, but Jack did not move. He had instantly recovered from his spasm of wrath, and as he saw Sammy quickly leap to the perpendicular again, he turned to Louise and said: “Please excuse me, Miss Morliss. I forgot that you were not familiar with our little game. *Sammy, if you can’t catch a hot ball better than that, you ought to go to school. Bring back that bundle of papers.”*

Jack's hand went involuntarily to his pocket, and Sammy, perceiving the movement, and anticipating a salve to his wounded honor, came quickly with the papers and laid them on the table.

"I'm ashamed of you, Sammy," said Jack, withdrawing his hand from his pocket. "I thought you were learning to play baseball. Miss Morliss, this boy must be an awful trial to you. I think I'll go down and hunt up Garder and see if he can't get a sensible boy to take Sammy's place."

Sammy hung his head and looked ashamed, but he was not a bit alarmed, and when Stelwyn had reached the outer door and called "Sammy," the youngster gave a quick look at Louise and darted out into the hall.

"Did I hurt you, Sammy?" said Jack.

"Naw," said the boy, in proud disdain.

"Here's two dollars, Sammy. Go to a few baseball games and learn how to catch—and let me tell you something, Sammy, if you can't catch a quick ball, never stand where it will be likely to hit you."

Sammy pondered on this advice as he returned to the office.

"Say, Miss Morliss," he began at once, "I'd a' caught that easy on the field, with a feller runnin' for the base, but Mr. Stelwyn didn't say nothin', and I wasn't ready. But he's a dandy player, though. If he'd give a little time to it he could get the best job on any team."

This was the highest tribute of praise that Sammy could pay, and, having paid it, he felt that Stelwyn was largely his debtor, in spite of the two dollars. If a girl wouldn't like an A1 baseball player, she was a mighty queer girl, in Sammy's catalogue.

The satisfactory report which Louise had brought from the penitentiary stimulated Stelwyn to renewed exertions and braced him for a quick-coming end of the conspiracy for escape.

Poker grew a trifle nervous under the strain of standing still for nearly an hour each evening while his master waited and watched and studied the prison windows with his glass, and when the lengthening shadows at last obscured Jack's hopes for that evening, the horse was glad, for he could not know the disappointment of his master.

In the meantime Stelwyn visited a costumer, and purchased a half-dozen wigs. They varied somewhat in size

and manner of adjustment, but they were all alike in appearance, and might have suggested that Jack was about to give a rendering of "Uncle Tom's Cabin" and wanted the wigs for Uncle Tom. Some other purchases of his, in the way of cosmetics, would have strengthened such an opinion, or perhaps might have led to the belief that he was preparing for a negro minstrel show. These properties he personally conveyed to his apartments, and old Colon was fully instructed as to the use for which they were intended. Stelwyn himself submitted to a series of experiments in color effects, so that he and his devoted adherent might fully understand how to obtain the best results. Colon was not a fit subject for experiment. For the first time in his chequered career he was a model.

On his next visit to Garder's office Jack announced to Louise a plan for letting her know when the signal was displayed.

"I ride every evening now, Miss Morliss," he said. "My horse knows where we spend our time, on the east side of the river. If I were to ride past your house, probably between six and seven o'clock, could you recognize me from the window? The horse is black."

Louise answered, impulsively:

"Oh, I know your beautiful horse, Mr. Stelwyn. I have often seen you riding on Norden Street"—and then for some unknown cause she was suddenly confused, and regretted her words.

"I am glad you admire *Poker*, Miss Morliss," said Jack. "A—I beg your pardon—that's what I call the horse, you know. He's a beauty, and a trusty old fellow. Miss Morliss, I will not ride past the house again until I have seen the flag, and when I do pass, I will ride slowly and will take off my hat in passing. Then you will know that the signal is displayed. Of course I shall come here and tell you in the morning, but I felt that you would be glad to have the news at once—the special, extra issue."

Louise had listened intently. She saw the little white flag at the prison window. She saw the black horse walking slowly past the house. She saw the rider lifting his hat, and she only said, "Thank you, very, very much, Mr. Stelwyn," and Jack went away satisfied.

Tuesday evening, as *Poker* quietly munched the leaves

that hung within his reach, and as Jack lowered his glass for the tenth time, and looked with tired eyes at the long line of barred windows—all exactly alike—suddenly his naked eye detected something moving at the window that he had watched so closely for many afternoons. In an instant the glass was again raised—and with sight suddenly cleared and strengthened he saw the bars of the window—each one standing out almost within grasping distance, and he saw a hand appear, and disappear, and re-appear between the lower ends of the bars. He saw the fingers pressed against the stonework below the bars, and then as the hand was again withdrawn he clearly saw that it had left a white spot upon the face of the stone sill of the window. And as he mentally steadied himself and lowered his glass, and then looked again and again—that little white spot seemed to grow and grow until to his eyes the whole gloomy face of the prison was illumined by the pervasive radiance of that bit of light.

Poker wondered equinely why such a tremendous pace was demanded of him on this particular return trip. There were no white spots dancing before his eyes. Perhaps he may also have been surprised to note that only for one short block on Norden Street his master desired the slowest of slow walks.

On Wednesday morning Stelwyn arrived at Garder's office just in time to see another client precede him into the private office. Without a moment's hesitation he opened the door and followed—unheeding the remonstrance of Sammy. Mr. Garder looked up with some annoyance, and said: "I'll be with you in a few moments, Jack. Please take a seat in the office."

"I beg your pardon, Garder," said Jack, easily. "Sammy didn't tell me you were busy. I can see you to-morrow just as well."

He looked at Louise as he bowed and left the room—and by some clairvoyant process the girl understood him. In a moment she also left the office and found Stelwyn in the hall.

"Just one moment, Miss Morliss," said Jack. "Did you understand?"

The girl's face was glowing as she half whispered: "Yes, I saw you. Is it true?"

"True!" said Jack. "The flag is out. Be prepared for the first dark night. You are not going down to-day, are you?"

"Shall I go, Mr. Stelwyn?" she asked.

"No—better not—he will understand. Do you feel very brave and strong—and ready?" Jack continued, with a little unconscious tenderness in his voice.

She answered with a smile: "You shall see how brave and how ready I can be."

"He must come straight to my rooms as soon as you have seen him, and tap at the side entrance. You understand it all, Miss Morliss?"

"I have not forgotten one word, Mr. Stelwyn."

"Then I can say good-by," said Jack. "When I come again I hope to tell you that your father is safe—and as happy as he can be—away from you."

Louise extended a hand, which Stelwyn promptly clasped. She could only trust herself to say, "Good-by, Mr. Stelwyn; I know you will do everything for the best," and then she returned quickly to the office and Jack went his way.

The weather was clear and fine. No threatening clouds appeared, to justify the hope of a dark or stormy night.

"Patience! Patience!" said Jack to himself, as he rode out on this Wednesday afternoon. "Damn patience!" and Poker realized that patience was being damned.

But Thursday dawned gray and cold, with a rainy south-east wind that brought a drizzle at noon, a heavy downpour at three o'clock, and a driving storm of rain before night.

Jack drove in his coupé to the office of Presto & Co., and left a note for Mr. Slick stating that he was unexpectedly summoned out of town for a week or more, and would let him know of his return. Thence he went to the railroad ticket office and purchased two tickets for Mexico City.

"I've just received a telegram," he said, "and must leave on the four o'clock train to-morrow morning. I shall take my old colored servant with me. What accommodations have you on the through car?"

"Why, everything, nearly, Mr. Stelwyn," said the clerk. "There's very little travel toward Mexico at this time of the year."

"Is the stateroom taken?"

The clerk consulted his card and his telegrams.

"No, sir," he said.

"Then put me down for the stateroom," said Jack. "I'll take old Cole in there with me. I'm getting so lazy that I actually want him night and morning."

"It's rough weather here to-day, Mr. Stelwyn," said the clerk, as Jack turned to go. "You'll be glad to get out of it."

"But I wouldn't start in such a storm," replied Stelwyn, "if it wasn't a case of urgent business at the other end."

Stelwyn drove to the club for dinner, and grumbled to the friends whom he met at his hard fortune in being compelled to start for Mexico at four o'clock in the morning in such weather.

From the club he reached his rooms at half-past eight.

"Jimmy," he said, as he alighted, "I'm sorry for you; but you'll have to be on deck here at quarter before four to-morrow morning—so that I can catch that four o'clock train. Now, don't come around at three o'clock and wake me up. I'm going to take Cole with me, and we shall be ready at three forty-five—not before. No baggage but our grips. The coupé will do. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Mr. Stelwyn," said the coachman. "At three forty-five with the coupé."

Jack was received, as usual, by old Colon, and he inspected the supplies which the servant had laid in.

"You old black glutton," he said, "you've got enough here to last an ordinary man for three months."

"If ole Cole gets hungry, Mas'r Jack," said the negro, with a grin, "he's very liable to make a noise—and yoe sade yoe couldn't have no noise."

Jack sat down in his library and reflected. He felt that everything had been done that could be done—and that all now depended on the kindness or unkindness of fate. He listened to the wind and the driving rain and the sound was unusually sweet to him, for the night was perfect for its purpose. As he thought of the prison and the parapet wall and the swift, dark river, he almost envied Morliss the excitement of his struggle for freedom.

Old Colon, on the lounge in the hall, mingled his snores with the music of the storm.

Stelwyn waited and listened, and listened and waited.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### WHILE THERE'S LIFE THERE'S HOPE

When John Morliss entered the penitentiary after his sentence he was a changed man. The sanguine and carelessly hopeful nature, which had sustained him during years of disappointment and discouragement had for the time yielded to this last blow of a relentless, persecuting fate. His fierce outbreak at the trial was the final despairing rally of a man overwhelmed by the cruel injustice of a world that had been always arrayed against him. With the click of the handcuffs upon his wrists even the spirit of hope withdrew its sweet elusive comfort, and only the strength of such manliness as could never be taken from him, remained to support him in his silent endurance. That manliness and the love of his daughter were all that kept the thought of suicide from his mind. He passed from the courthouse to the jail, and from the jail to the penitentiary with a silent, hopeless, apathetic resignation. He dreamed of freedom as he went through the changeless routine of prison life, but even in the dreaming he felt the unreality, the consciousness that it was only a dream. It was like those other dreams of success in his art, which no longer came to cheer him even for a moment with their tantalizing promises.

When he was summoned to meet his daughter at her first visit, and learned how she had secured permission to see him once a week, he was glad in a way—as the dying man is glad to have his dearest ones near him, but there was no real joy—no hope—none of his old-time cheeriness of spirit, and even her presence and her encouraging words had lost their power to lift him. He was too deep in the dismal slough. A little more weary struggling, a little deeper sinking, and *he would be beyond all possible resurrection.* This is what *he felt, and so feeling, ceased to struggle.*

*But while love and faith remain, their brighter sister can-*

not be long absent. It needs but a beckoning finger to call her back. So the love of Morliss for his daughter and his faith in her called back the errant hope that had forsaken him.

Her second visit to the penitentiary transformed his world. His art—that life dream which had been fading for years, and which at last had passed into darkness and nothing, became suddenly real and true and attainable. Prison! Disgrace! Unjust judges! They had all lost their power to wound his spirit. His art was recognized, and no prison walls could confine his joyful pride. He would reck nothing to be called burglar or murderer if he could be known as artist. His dream of freedom became an intense longing for freedom, a fierce resolve to struggle with all his mental and physical strength for that liberty which would permit him to enter the lists once more, clad in his new armor of success.

With this stalwart hope to sustain him, difficulties and dangers became only cobwebs across his path, trifling annoyances swept easily away.

When Louise left him he was keen, determined, alert, watchful and ready for every opportunity.

The books which Ralph had sent were delivered to him, with Ralph's note to the warden—marked approved—on the evening after his daughter's visit. He could not fail to connect this present with what Louise had told him about the careful examination of books, and he readily discovered the six files. So, after all, Ralph was the man. No! Ralph could never have criticised his paintings as Louise had reported. He might have bought the pictures to help Louise—but—he knew that she would not have sold them to Ralph. There was some mystery that he could not fathom. Probably Ralph was concerned with some one else in the matter. At all events he had the files, and he was brave and strong to use them. There was no better place to keep them than in the backs of the books in which they had been sent. He replaced them carefully, and made a pretense of reading one of the books until dark. Then he piled the books together on the floor, undressed himself, and lay down on his iron bed—and waited.

The penitentiary at Compos was of the old-fashioned kind. Neither the security nor the comfort of prisoners received the attention which more recent improvements have added.

The cell in which Morliss was locked each night after his supper was a room about twelve feet long and eight feet wide. The inclosing walls were of brick or stone, and the floor of wood. The heavy door which opened into the corridor from one end of the cell was solid wood in its lower half, but the upper half was an open grille of wrought iron, so that the guard in the corridor could at once see the inside of the cell and hear any unusual sound from its inmate.

Opposite to the door was a nearly square window, guarded on the outside by vertical wrought iron bars three-quarters of an inch thick, placed four inches apart and built into the solid masonry of the wall.

Across the end of the cell under the window was an iron bedstead provided with a thin husk mattress, two coarse sheets, and a single blanket. A quart pail full of fresh water and a tin cup were placed in the cell each evening.

By standing in his bed Morliss could lean his elbows on the window sill and look across the river at the wooded bank beyond.

The night guard had his station at the south end of the corridor, from whence he had sight of every door, and presumably could detect an unusual sound from any cell. At regular intervals he was supposed to make a trip through the length of the corridor, to assure himself that all was well with the seventy-nine numbers under his care. The cells in this corridor counted from number 80 to number 159, beginning at the south end. John Morliss was number 145, the seventh cell from the north end, on the east side.

Two hours after dark, and just as the guard had finished his tour of observation, Morliss rose silently and felt in the darkness for one of the books. He noiselessly extracted the file and replaced the book. Then on his naked feet he stole cautiously to the grated door and listened. The corridor was silent. A little glimmer of light came from the south end, where the guard was seated. The prisoners seemed all asleep.

In a moment, guided by the faint light from the window, he crept back and, standing on the bed, peered out between the bars. The gaslight from the guardhouse at the north end of the river wall threw an uncertain play of light and shadow on the court below and on the dark river. Looking to the south, away from the light, he could dimly make out

the high wooded bluffs beyond the stream. The court was silent and deserted.

Holding to one of the bars with his left hand, and keeping his head from the front of the window, he extended his right hand with the file and passed it between two bars. He realized that all his sawing must be done from the outside. Any defacement of the bars on the inside would be readily detected.

He stood silently listening for a moment, then whispering, "The first stroke for freedom!" he pressed the file against the bottom of the middle bar and drew it quickly toward him. In the dead silence of the night that shrieking sound seemed to his tensely-strained hearing like the yell of a fiend. Trembling with fear and sudden despair, he dropped quickly to the bed and lay silently waiting, with the file tightly gripped in his right hand. In that moment, had a guard entered the cell, Morliss would have sprung upon him and tried to poniard him with the file.

But no guard appeared. No sound seemed to break the silence except the steady wash of the river against the outer wall. But as he grew calmer and listened, he could detect and distinguish other sounds of the night—sounds always heard but never before noticed. A tree-toad away across the river was piping an intermittent song. An early beetle whirred vaguely about the window. A faint, droning, confused murmur came from the city. Through the grated door he heard sounds never known before. He realized that each one of the cells in that long corridor contained a man who was sleeping or trying to sleep. He could hear faint mutterings, restless movements, smothered snores. Gradually, as he lay and listened, he began to think that the night, so silent before, had grown actually noisy. His hand relaxed its fierce grip of the file and he reflected calmly—and while he was reflecting the guard passed slowly along the corridor and returned to his post.

Then Morliss arose once more and, dipping a cupful of water from the pail, placed it on the ledge of the window, and having thoroughly wet the file, again began his work with new courage.

With short, hard-pressed, slow strokes of the file and frequent wettings he worked for an hour—at first pausing to listen after each cut—then growing bolder and sawing more

rapidly—yet always with an ear alert for the slightest *unusual* sound. Those moments of anxious listening when he feared that all was betrayed, had educated his hearing temporarily to the acuteness of that of the historic Indian.

At the first movement of the guard he deliberately felt with his finger the depth of the cut that he had made. It was half through the bar. Then he took the cup of water from the window and silently lay down on his bed, and when the guard passed his door there was nothing to suggest that No. 145 was not sound asleep.

For another hour he toiled steadily. His hands grew numb and weak, and his back ached furiously from the long strain of his awkward position—but the bar was cut to within a few fibers of its inner edge. He knew that one strong pull would sever it. Carefully replacing the file in its book, he murmured before dropping into the healthy sleep of the physically weary. “Six bars will be enough—six files—six nights. Then for the outside—the court and the wall. Tomorrow we shall see,” and for the rest of that night he slept his first sound sleep in the Compos penitentiary.

With the morning came the usual hurried inspection of cells, the march to breakfast, and thence to the workshop at the south end of the prison enclosure. Morliss furtively eyed the river wall and the outhouses, tool-shops, etc., that were built against it. From the roof of one of those sheds it would be easy to reach the wide top of the parapet wall. He must find some means of climbing to one of those roofs. His mind was very busy during the day, but it was not fixed upon the work under his hand.

The outer or parapet wall was about twelve feet high from the pavement of the court. The highest point of the lean-to sheds was about ten feet. At the north end of the court and against the wall was the guardhouse, with steps leading from its interior up to the round tower which covered the northeast angle of the inclosing wall of the prison grounds. From this round tower two doors opened out to the wide parapet of the north and east walls respectively.

The post of duty of the sentries was on the top of these walls, and except while they were being relieved the door of the guardhouse in the court was kept locked.

*Morliss had no fear of the sentries on a dark and especially a stormy night. He had seen enough of the prison*

discipline to make him confident that on such a night these two gentlemen would keep themselves snugly together under the roof of the tower except at rare intervals.

With a way to reach the court from his window and a way to reach the top of the wall from the court, he feared no interruption from guards or sentries.

This problem of ways and means he studied intensely through the day, and at six o'clock, as he marched back in the compact squad of convicts he looked again at the row of outhouses that were built along the inside of the parapet wall. This time he knew definitely what he was looking for, and he found it just where he had expected. It was only a little projection of the corner post of the south shed, rising a few inches above the shingle roof and rounded off at the upper end. Its top was about nine feet above the pavement of the court. Morliss enjoyed his coarse fare at supper. He was satisfied with his day's work.

The night brought a disappointment. He was forced to postpone his work with the files. Shortly after supper the convict who occupied cell No. 147, adjoining Morliss, became violently ill. His groans and outcries summoned the guard, and the guard summoned other guards, and eventually they summoned the prison physician. Morliss did not learn, nor did he care to learn, what was the matter. He only knew that with the running back and forth to that cell, which continued through the night, it was unsafe for him to work.

With lost sleep and with no progress to justify it, he was jaded and nervous during the following day.

The sick man was removed to the prison hospital, and a fresh arrival was installed in his cell. The newcomer was rebellious at fate. He spent the night in tramping up and down the cell—now and then breaking out into a volley of curses which quickly summoned the guard. Again there was no work and but little sleep for Morliss.

But on the third night quiet reigned once more. A special prison treatment had subdued the unruly neighbor, and the guard was very tired. Morliss was also tired, but he nevertheless accomplished a second bar, and began a third before daybreak. He was once more cheerful and strong. With but a few hours sleep, and with hard work, day and night, he was sustained by a feverish nervous energy. *Each stroke of the file wore upon his physical endurance as it wore*

upon the bar, but it also increased his longing for liberty as it decreased the obstacles. It was the fight of will-power inspired by hope, against fleshly weariness.

When Louise came to see him on Wednesday, four bars were cut to a thread. Only two more were necessary. There were seven bars in the window, but the space of six was sufficient, and he needed the seventh in place.

At this meeting with his daughter, he was the more ardent of the two. Even Louise's bright hopefulness seemed weak, compared with the restless, eager confidence of the nerve-strained man who felt that all that he desired in life was almost within reach.

One thing was lacking to the success of his plans. He needed a sharp knife or some other cutting implement. He studied ways and means again—and once more his stimulated brain quickly suggested the expedient. When utterly worn out by standing in a cramped position and sawing at a window bar, he rested himself by sitting on the bed, while with an open book spread out on his knees he filed at the flat, steel handle end of one file with the file surface of another. A few nights of this intermittent recreation produced a sharp cutting edge. After each short period devoted to this amusement, he carefully lifted the book to the window sill and blew the filings to the outside, and then resumed his more serious business at the bar. His knife was wanted only at the last.

At about three o'clock on Tuesday morning the sixth bar was cut to line with the five previous ones. A few quick strokes of the file would sever them all. He felt each bar carefully and satisfied himself that no more should be done at present, and then with throbbing head and aching muscles he lay down and passed slowly into a semi-conscious state between sleep and waking. He heard every movement of the guard. He heard every sound from the outside—every sleepy bird-twitter or distant cock-crow that heralded the coming day, but all these voices of the dawn were woven in and out through a dream and always blended and harmonized with the dear music of his daughter's voice telling him that he was free and honored.

He was promptly on his feet at the six o'clock call, and as *he thoroughly enjoyed his breakfast he could not help a sentiment of pity even for the rough outcasts who shared his*

mess. He would have liked to stand up and bid them all farewell, and tell them how glad he was for himself—and how sorry for them.

To a man like John Morliss, whose real life is in his imagination, there is a certain shade of regret in leaving any *habitual* surroundings—even those of a prison.

Through the day he was thinking of—the weather. Every time that a cloud, passing before the sun, darkened the workshop for a few moments, his heart beat more quickly, and he felt as if the longed-for storm was approaching. Then as the sun reappeared he resolutely strove to convince himself of his folly. He did not want a storm yet. If it came on that night it would be less likely to come on another. So he philosophized—and still watched the weather.

When he was marched into his cell after supper, the sky was cloudless, and the setting sun lighted up the river and the wooded hillside beyond with the subdued glory of sunset light.

He looked long and earnestly at the picture, and then he suddenly remembered that he was a convict about to make his escape, and that he was to show a signal. Could he have borrowed Jack's field-glass he might perhaps have detected Jack and his black horse half hidden on that wooded hillside, and anxiously awaiting that signal.

He stepped down from the bed and picked up one of the books—one that he had not yet *used*. Watching the door and listening for the sound of approaching steps, he hastily took out the file still wrapped in its white paper—gummed around the file as Jack had secured it. He tore off the paper and replaced the file in the book. Then he selected a small piece of the paper, well-gummed on one side, and put the rest between the leaves of the book.

He mounted to the bed again, and with his hand thrust between the bars, felt along the outer edge of the stone window sill. The surface was rough and greasy. The disintegrating and soot-covered limestone did not satisfy him. He withdrew his hand and, after listening for a moment, tried another point near the end of the sill. This seemed better. After looking quickly behind him and glancing up and down the court and the parapet wall, he moistened the gummed side of the scrap of paper and pressed it against the *face of the sill*. He half expected to see it flutter down into

the court, but Jack's gum was as good as his field-glass—both did the work required.

As Morliss drew back in a watchful dread, lest some guard might see his signal, he heard the clattering of horse hoofs from across the river. Peering out once more he caught a quick view of a man on horseback as he emerged from behind the trees that concealed the east road and passed out of sight at a gallop.

Morliss *knew* that his signal had been seen. The usual man would have *hoped* that this horseman was the expected witness of the white paper index, and would have watched and waited, and wondered if he might not be mistaken in his hope. To a man of the sanguine temperament of Morliss a belief is a fact until contradicted by stern counter-facts. As he stretched his weary body on the prison bed, the flying horseman, bearer of good tidings, though really seen but for one swift instant, became the most vivid and persistent figure of his dreams.

He did not expect Louise in the morning. He did not want to see her in that prison again. He already felt himself a free man. He would see her when really free. He knew that the fleet-footed horse had borne the news to her. She was waiting to greet him in their own home.

On Wednesday night he had but little sleep. Through the long, weary hours he watched at his barred window—now only barred in appearance—waiting and longing for darkness. The night was clear and fine. The light from the corner tower on the parapet wall burned with unusual brilliancy. The sentries patrolled the wall leisurely as if they enjoyed being out under the beautiful star-lit sky. With all his mad longing for freedom, Morliss was not mad enough to attempt an escape with the certainty of failure.

But on Thursday, in spite of his night of vigils, he grew happier as the day grew older, for the increasing storm and the increasing darkness were to him increasing peace and increasing light.

## CHAPTER XIX

### A DARING ESCAPE

Supper was finished, each convict was securely locked in his cell, and with the storm of wind and rain outside and the storm of eager hope and courage inside, Number 145 prepared for his escape.

As soon as the early gloom of evening justified him, he took off his shoes, and his prison blouse. He stripped his bed to the mattress and, lying down in his shirt and trousers and socks, he pulled both the sheets over him. With his improvised knife in hand he began work even before the night had come.

Lying on his back and fitting the upper edges of the two sheets together he smoothed them out for a few feet of their length, creased them vertically at about one-third of their width, and, still lying on the bed, cut the sheets both at once to the length of his fold. Then he pulled up the lower portions, joined the edges again, folded them, and continued his cut to the end. The two severed strips of coarse cotton cloth, about twenty inches wide and six and a half feet long, he gathered up and tucked under him. Then he pulled the remaining two-thirds of the two sheets so that the cut edges were fairly together, and the middle of the narrowed covering was over him. Down this middle he made another straight cut. The two sheets were separated into six lengths of cotton cloth, measuring together about forty feet. Over this tangle of severed sheeting and over himself he pulled the blanket.

The guard had passed once, but Morliss was apparently asleep during the passage. It was not yet nine o'clock.

With the blanket still over him he felt for two ends of his cotton strips, and knotted them strongly together with the least possible waste of length. Then sliding one of the strips through his fingers to the free end, he joined it firmly to the

end of a third piece. Before ten o'clock he had a rope of cotton cloth which he estimated to be at least thirty feet in length.

"Doubled, it will surely hold," he said to himself. "Fifteen feet! From the end I can stand on the pavement."

He stood upon the bed and gently raised the window a few inches. The southeast storm drove into his face with its fury of wind and rain. "No matter," he murmured; "I hope to be wetter and colder before this night is over."

The outer world was all darkness and noise. He could see nothing but the faint, foggy twinkle of the guard light at the northeast corner, shining like a half-clouded star and lighting nothing but the halo of mist that surrounded it. He could hear only the wild gusty rushing of the wind and the sweep of the driving rain. He could hardly have distinguished a voice at his ear. He softly lowered the window and once more stretched himself on the bed. In a few moments he saw the guard pass the door. He heard no footsteps. The roar of the storm drowned all other sounds. He calculated that the hour was about half past ten.

As the guard returned to his station Morliss arose quickly. He crept to the door and stood silently listening for some moments. Then he turned with a quick rush, and—checked himself and stood still. "John Morliss," he said, slowly, in a whisper, "don't be a fool. You have an hour to do this thing, and you must do it right. Think, you fool, think!"

After a few seconds of this self-imposed deliberation, he mounted to the bed and gradually, little by little, raised the window to its full height. The rain poured in flood-like, and the wind roared through the opening, but he cared nothing for the rain, and he knew that the wind could slam no doors, and that the sleepy guard would detect no variation in the tone of the storm.

With his file he rapidly severed the remaining fibers of the six bars, and, grasping two bars, he drew himself up until he could obtain a precarious seat on the narrow sill of the window. Holding firmly to the single uncut bar with his left hand, he exerted all the strength of his right arm in bending the middle bar outward. He succeeded in forcing it out so far that he could get one leg through the eight-inch opening, and then with a grip of his heel on the outside and sitting astride the window opening, he had full play

for the strength of both arms, backed by the whole power of his body. Grasping the bent bar in two hands and stiffening himself to the lift, he slowly raised it until it stood out nearly at right angles to the wall, bent sharply near the top. Another bar followed. As he strained at the third one he felt it suddenly yield. Two bricks loosened from the wall above struck the window sill and bounded to the court below. The bar came free in his hands. For one instant he listened fearfully, then realizing that retreat was now impossible, he gently dropped the loose bar upon his bed and seized the next one. In fifteen minutes the window was clear except for the single fixed bar.

He stepped down to the bed which was now soaked from the in-pouring rain, and picked up his cotton rope. After rapidly but carefully testing each knot, he passed one end through the window, close to the standing bar, and payed it out to half its length. Then holding it in position he passed the other end through on the other side of the bar and dropped it down. The rope now hung from its middle around the iron bar, and the two ends swung in the wind below.

Pausing for one listening moment, he mounted again to the window sill and looked out into the night. It was so dark and the rain drove in such solid sheets that even from where he sat he could only vaguely distinguish the two white streamers of cloth blown fiercely back and forth and lashing the wall below him. These and the faint twinkle of the guardhouse light were all that was visible in the inky blackness. He closed the window and sat on the outside sill.

Grasping the doubled rope with both hands, he gently lowered himself, until he hung clear of the window sill. The rope and the bar were true to the strain. Slowly and with infinite labor he began his hand-over-hand descent. The loose ends below him fluttered so wildly that he could not grasp them between his feet, and at each lower movement he was forced to hold with one hand until with the other he could find and clutch together the two ropes beneath him.

In the first story, directly below the window of his cell, was one of the windows of the prison dining-room. As he swayed down opposite this window he was in mortal terror *lest the driving wind or a careless movement should hurl*

him crashing against the glass. He felt cautiously with his feet for the sill of this window. Embarrassed by his fear of the glass, his efforts to find the window-sill, and the wild flapping of his ropes, he failed to secure both folds of the cloth tightly in his right hand before releasing the grip of his left hand. In an instant one length of the rope was torn from him and went spinning upward as he fell. He half turned and his heels struck the sill below him and he partly sprang and partly fell to the pavement, about five feet below. He landed well on his feet, but staggered back against the wall, and thence to the ground. The long rope of sheet still grasped in his right hand came fluttering down upon him.

For a few seconds he lay half-dazed on the pavement, then slowly rose and shook himself and wiped the dripping water from his eyes and face. He felt jarred and sore, but except for a bruise on the back of one hand, where he had struck the brickwork, he was sound and unwounded.

He looked up at the prison windows and listened. There was no light and no movement. So far as he could determine his fall had not been heard. Then, gathering up his cotton rope and crouching low, he moved quickly through the blackness straight across the open court. In a moment his outstretched hand encountered the wooden sheathing of one of the sheds. He felt his way slowly along the front of the sheds for about a hundred feet, to the south end of the out-buildings. The darkness was so complete that only by the sense of touch could he know when he reached the end. To make doubly sure he followed the south side of the shed down to the parapet wall, then returned again to the corner. At this corner was the post that he was in search of, and its projecting top should be about three feet above his head. Forming a loop with his rope he whirled it up into the darkness at the top of the invisible post. At the third trial the sheeting caught and held. He pulled it tight and twisted the two strands together, and then with two quick hand-over-hand reaches he grasped the top of the post and clambered safely to the roof.

As he stood erect for one instant, a strange revulsion of feeling swept upon him without warning, that sudden, unaccountable palsy of hope and energy that comes like an unexpected gust of wind upon men of his temperament. He stretched himself upon the shingle roof of the shed and made

no movement, though the rain beat his uncovered head and ran in rivulets down his arms and his body. The battle was not for such as he. He would lie there and die. Had a guard appeared at his side, Morliss would have made no resistance nor even an effort to rise. For those few moments death seemed to him the sweetest thing that life had to offer.

But as he lay motionless, and the quick heart-beats and the short panting breath, that followed his tremendous exertions, gradually slowed to the normal of a healthy man—he became aware of a feeling of physical discomfort. He raised his right hand and wiped the water from his face, and slowly lifted himself to a sitting position. With his fifteen minutes of silent rest on that hard roof in the driving rain, the dark cloud of despair had been driven or washed from within him and borne away on the outer storm of wind and water. He was again the man struggling for dear freedom and dearer fame.

On his hands and knees he crawled quickly up the sloping roof, carrying with him his precious rope of sheeting. The top of the parapet wall was only two feet above the roof. He cautiously raised his head and looked along the wall toward the misty light at the north end. As he watched, something suddenly obscured the light. It shone out again in an instant, and then was partly hidden as if by a moving, swaying body between him and the light. He heard no sound but the sounds of the storm and the roaring river—but he knew that a sentry was advancing toward him on the parapet.

He quickly stretched himself at full length on the roof, close to the wall. With his ear pressed against the stonework it seemed that he rather felt than heard the quick tread of the sentry as he passed almost over his head, and in a few moments passed again on the return to shelter.

Then Morliss stood up and quickly clambered to the top of the wall. He looked back for one instant toward the prison. Four scarcely discernible points of light hung in the void of blackness. He could not distinguish the faintest tracing of the outlines of a building.

He crept across the wall to the river edge and looked down. There was—nothing. He was gazing into impenetrable, fathomless darkness. But he would have known

that the river was there, had he never seen it, for now he heard, below, and yet predominating, the shriek of the wind and the *whishing* lash of the rain, the deep-toned, solemn roar of that impetuous volume of water, as it swept tumultuously beneath him. It was a voice out of the mystery of darkness, an awful sound of unseen, tremendous, irresistible power.

Many a braver man than John Morliss would have hesitated long and perhaps have finally failed to dare the leap into that roaring abysmal darkness. But Morliss was not a very brave man. He was only an impetuous man. His present mood—a rebound from his utter despair of a short half hour before—was a match even for the impetuous stream of the river.

He knew that the surface of the water was about fifteen feet below him. He gathered up his faithful rope of sheeting, intending to lower himself to the river by its aid, and then he remembered that he must reach the water as far out as possible, so as to avoid the sweep of the current against the wall.

With that remembrance there came over him a sudden spasm of wild daring—an exhilaration due to his overstrained nerves and the appeal of his weird surroundings.

He hurled the compact roll of cotton straight out before him, and saw it suddenly open and lengthen and writhe into swiftly changing shapes of ghostliness before it was swept away into the darkness. Then, as the last beckoning white finger disappeared, he sprang with all his power far out into the abyss.

He involuntarily straightened himself in the air and shot down feet foremost into the black turbid flood.

Then for seeming ages his ears were stunned by uproar, and his struggling limbs seemed motionless compared with the swift thought. He was fighting desperately, but felt himself powerless. He was being carried somewhere—where he knew not. His foot, thrust violently outward, encountered the wall, and then suddenly his head was above water and he breathed life again.

With the first gasp he looked back and saw a faint twinkle of light far behind him, and in the instant of seeing it he knew that it was the light at the northeast corner of the *prison inclosure*, and that he was a long way clear of the

wall. In the next instant he turned straight to the left, and began to struggle with all the power of a strong swimmer across the current.

He was conscious that here was his last fight for freedom, and unconsciously he felt it to be a fight for life. He fought as a man fights for life.

For only three minutes it endured, and then the current weakened, his foot struck bottom, and he crawled out and fell on the wet sand of the shore.

He had strength enough left to shake his fist at that distant misty light, and to laugh—a gurgling, watery laugh—and then he turned on his side and sheltered his face with his hand and rested silently while the rain still poured upon him.

Gradually he became conscious of a sharp, increasing pain on the outside of his left foot and ankle. Then, for the first time, he remembered that he had struck the wall with that foot. He sat up and, feeling with his hand, discovered that his sock was half torn away, and his foot was very sore to the touch. It was also very wet—but everything was very wet. In the darkness he placed his fingers on the sore spot and brought them quickly to his lips. Yes—it was blood. Defying the pain, he moved his foot and ankle to assure himself that no bones were broken, and after a moment's reflection he seized the left sleeve of his shirt with his right hand and tore it off at the shoulder. With the empty sleeve he bound his wounded foot and stood up. Dizzy and bewildered, like a man violently awakened from a heavy sleep in a dark room, he stood for a few minutes, trying to get his bearings. He looked this way and that way—and at first his dimmed and weary eyes saw nothing but the universal blackness.

Slowly as he looked and listened and resolutely steadied his thought—the faint, blurred, spark-light of the prison watchtower stole out of the gloom, and he heard the wash of the river close beside him. He stated the situation to himself, aloud: "The light is about due south. The river is east. If I go away from the light and away from the river I shall be going northwest, and shall strike the line of Norden Street. Then there is a bank to climb to the street, and from there the street lamps will guide me."

*Painfully and slowly he began his groping march across*

the uneven sand and stone of the river shore. The darkness was so intense that he actually stumbled and fell against the steep slope of the street embankment before he knew that it was near.

He climbed quickly up the bank, and as his head rose above the level of the street his eyes, so long accustomed to darkness, caught instantly the glimmer of a street lamp two blocks away. He stood upon the street and looked and listened.

There was no sound but the constant rush of the wind and the rain, and the dull, muffled roar of the river, now far behind him. He could see only the fitful intermittent flashes of the street lamps, as the storm momentarily obscured or revealed them.

With his left arm bare and his left foot swathed in his shirtsleeve, with no covering for his head and no shoes—he found the middle of the road and limped as rapidly as possible up the street toward the west. His pace increased as he advanced. Heedless of the rough stones that cut his nearly naked feet he was fairly running when he drew near the first lamp-post, at the corner which he had rounded so many times in his daily walks to and from his business. He checked himself and looked and listened once more. Only the same gusty rushing of the wind and the rain! Only the same darkness emphasized by the distant misty twinkles of light! No living creature was discoverable to sight or hearing.

He made a wide circuit of the lamp-post at the corner and reached the old wooden sidewalk. Creeping along in the darkness with his right hand at intervals touching the rough board fence as a guide, he came to a point where there was no fence to guide him. His hand strayed out into the darkness and he fell from the sidewalk into the vacant lot.

He sprang up quickly with a laugh as he remembered why that fence was gone, and then, as he regained the sidewalk, the evil spirit of discouragement seized him once more. The destruction of that fence was the beginning of his great misfortune. He had fallen into the pit that he himself had digged. What next was to come to him? Would his daughter be ready and expecting him? Would not all his hard fight be wasted? What safety could he hope for?

What could he believe of the vague promises held out to him? He felt himself a man accursed by fate. Why should he struggle against the inevitable?

With a premonition of impending disaster the exhausted, wounded, tattered old man crept slowly through the midnight storm and darkness, and felt his way dumbly up the steps of his cottage, as a stricken beast returns to its lair to die.

## CHAPTER XX

### THE DEMON OF MISFORTUNE

On this stormy Thursday Louise was filled with an eager impatience, and her mind was intent on her plans and her father's fortunes. If he should be detected and should fail in this attempt, there would be almost no chance of any future success. But the severity of the storm and the darkness that she knew would come with nightfall were greatly in her favor. Her hopeful spirits were rarely disturbed by thoughts of possible failure.

She was so preoccupied that Mr. Garder looked at her several times over his glasses with a mild expression of surprise, when she seemed to miss the meaning of what he was saying to her. The old man reflected that she was only a girl after all, and perhaps the dismal weather had affected her feminine nerves.

Somewhat earlier than usual he looked at his watch and said: "Miss Morliss, this is such a wretched day that I don't feel like any more work. Please put away your books. I am going to send for a cab and will take you home. I can't have you catching cold by trying to walk through this rain."

"Why, Mr. Garder," said Louise, very much surprised, "I never catch cold. I don't mind the rain a bit. I came out well protected."

"Tut! tut! young lady," replied the lawyer; "never object to the ruling of the court when it's in your favor. Get your cloak. Sammy, run down and call a cab."

As they drove to Norden Street, Mr. Garder talked as he would have talked to a young girl in whom he felt the interest of old friendship. Little by little, with the skill of a cross-examiner, a suggestion, an indirect inquiry, but always the friendly tone and manner that kept her at ease, he drew her out to tell him of her tastes in reading and amusements, and her daily life at home. He did not speak of her father.

"Better wait," he said to himself, "until we are a little longer acquainted."

The girl's intuitive perception, more than Mr. Garder's kindly manner, made her feel that he was truly her friend. She would not have hesitated to talk to him frankly about her father if he had alluded to the subject. She would even have been glad to tell him all her plans, and her anxieties about the work of that very night. But she could not be disloyal to Stelwyn, and if Stelwyn had wished her to confide in Mr. Garder, he would have told her so.

As they drew near the house he said: "Miss Morliss, you will not be offended at what I am going to say. I am only an old lawyer, whose long experience has perhaps made him keen to detect slight shades of variation in the manner of the people whom he meets, whether as friends or as adversaries. As a sincere friend, though only a new one, I have not failed to notice that something unusual has affected you for several days. I do not allude to this from any unworthy curiosity, but only to assure you that if at any time you feel the need of advice or assistance, you may count on me, not as an employer, but as one who will gladly fill the place of an elder brother or a father, so far as you will permit him to do so."

The lawyer was half ashamed of this unbusiness-like but honest confession of his deep interest in the young girl whom he had known for only a few weeks, and he was glad that the cab came to a halt as he finished his elaborate sentence.

Louise was surprised, a little confused, and very proud and grateful.

"Mr. Garder," she said, "I don't know what I have done to make you so very kind to me, but I thank you for it, more than I can say. I have been worried a little, but no one could help me now. When the time comes I shall beg you not to forget that rash promise of yours, for then no one can help us—me, I should say—as you can."

Garder pondered on these words as he drove back.

"Confound it!" he remarked to himself; "that's the very thing Jack said—'when the time comes, trot out your legal knowledge and make a fight.' The rascal has got this little girl all stirred up with his schemes for her father. I'll take measures with him to-morrow—no, he's going to Mexico. Well, he'll be out of the way for a time, at least."

The lawyer's friendly words made Louise very happy, and added materially to her stock of hopefulness. With such a power to help, there could be no failure in the end.

Her mother was preparing supper in the kitchen, and, after a word and a kiss, Louise ran upstairs and got out a complete suit of her father's clothes. Watching her opportunity, she conveyed them all safely down to the little front parlor and hid them under the lounge.

"He will be very wet," she thought, and so she brought towels also.

After supper was over and the work done, Mrs. Morliss sat down with some sewing, and Louise took possession of the lounge.

There was but little conversation. They rarely talked much together. Mrs. Morliss seemed to have grown more and more taciturn, and Louise, thinking always of the plans for her father, did not notice her mother's increasing gloom.

But as the girl listened to the noise of the storm and thought of the swift river, swollen by heavy rains, and of the awful darkness, she began to grow nervous. She sat up and peered through the window.

"What a terrible night," she said, with a shiver.

Mrs. Morliss looked up carelessly.

"I thought you loved to hear the wind, Louise," she said.

"Yes," replied the girl; "but it is so awful to-night—and the rain—I can't help thinking of the poor people that have to be out in it."

"I don't think the streets are crowded," said Mrs. Morliss.

"I hope not," replied Louise, quickly, as she thought again of her escaping father.

They were silent once more, both thinking of the same man. Time had a little softened the bitterness of the angry wife's hatred. If Louise had dared to speak of her father to-night, the mother would have at least listened. Who can tell what might have been achieved—what misery might have been avoided!

But Fate willed otherwise. Louise, more than ever careful, did not dare to mention the name of the man whose successful escape depended so largely upon her caution and skill to-night.

*Mrs. Morliss was too proud to allude to a subject which she had herself so positively banished.*

They sat in silence, but not alone. The malignant demon of Personal Misfortune, born in the moment of John Morliss' birth and destined to be the companion of his life, hovered with invisible wings over this wife and daughter.

The storm raged, and the unsuspecting women silently thought, and the invisible demon silently poised himself above them and bided his time.

It was nearly eleven o'clock when Mrs. Morliss rose and gathered up her work.

"Louise, dear," she said, "you must be tired, and I can see that you are nervous. Don't you think you had better go to bed?"

"Not yet, mother," said the girl, sitting up quickly. "I am not tired at all. You go to bed. I will come pretty soon."

"Good-night, dear," said the mother, as she bent and kissed her daughter. "Don't sit up too late," and she went into the hall.

Louise stood up silently for an instant; then, with some sudden, unknown impulse, she darted after Mrs. Morliss.

She put her arms around her mother's neck and drew her face down to her own. "Mother, dear," she whispered, "I do feel nervous to-night. I can't tell why. Mother, do you love me?"

Mrs. Morliss kissed her daughter again and again.

"You are all I have, and all I want to love, dear," she said. "You are all in the world to me. Come, little girl, put out the light and come to bed with me. Just hear the storm. Come, we will comfort each other."

"No, mother, dear," said Louise, recovering herself; "I want to think a little while longer. I will come soon. You know I am not often nervous, and I mustn't give up to it. I will fight it out. Now, good-night. Go to sleep." She kissed her mother again and slipped from her, and Mrs. Morliss went upstairs to her room.

Louise returned to the parlor with a trace of tears in her eyes and a heightened color of excitement. She turned the lamp low, and stood in the hall until she knew that her mother was in bed. Then she quickly extinguished the light and stole silently to the front door. Perhaps her father might be already on the way. With a hand on the doorknob, she stood and waited, listening to every variation in the voices

of the wind and the rain, straining her ears intently at every momentary lull in the noise of the storm.

After a few moments she gently turned the handle of the door. As the latch was loosened the sudden pressure nearly threw her backward. The wind rushed in and rattled the portières on their rods, and after a rustling of loose papers and a slapping of picture frames against the wall, died away in a smothered moan, as with all her strength she forced the door to its place again.

She leaned against the wall for an instant and pressed both hands over her eyes.

"Oh, this awful waiting!" she whispered. "It is worse than the worst!"

She went silently into the parlor and cautiously raised the window shade a few inches. Crouching on a low chair, she rested her arms on the sill and peered out into the night. The rain that beat against the glass in gusty sheets seemed to smite her face as its fury smote her nerves. But intermittently she saw a light still burning in the house across the street, and when that light was visible she could also dimly see the gleam of the wet board walk that led from the street to the steps of her own cottage.

At last, in one of those faint, spasmodic illuminations, her straining eyes caught the blurred outline of a bent figure that turned in from the street and took two slow steps up the approach to the house. Then a sudden rush of the storm obscured everything, and the lazy little clock on the mantel began its slow, preliminary, whirring sound. She knew that she had seen her father. She knew that the clock was about to strike twelve. She thought of the clothes under the lounge. She remembered her sleeping mother, who must not be awakened. She recalled the street and number of Stelwyn's apartments.

All these things went through her mind, and her hand was on the handle of the front door when the clock struck its third stroke and her heart struck its fiftieth.

Yet she did not fail to remember that the door must be open only for an instant—the briefest possible instant—and, with one hand tightly clutching the doorknob and the other pressed to her side, she resolutely waited for the last stroke of the hour.

How painfully slow and deliberate the little clock was! She remembered stories of the effects of hasheesh, and wondered whether any drug could make those strokes seem longer apart. She realized that she was very nervous and must control herself. Fifty thoughts flashed *slowly* through her mind while the clock was striking. She was not conscious of counting the strokes, and yet with the twelfth stroke her hand involuntarily pressed the doorknob, and at the instant she felt that another hand touched the opposite side.

Even in that moment she did not forget to brace herself against the force of the rushing wind. With her left hand she turned the knob suddenly, and as the door drove inward she leaned her weight against it and extended her right hand to grasp her father and draw him quickly in.

The extended hand seized a wet, naked arm, and instantly dropped it. The girl fell back a step, with a gasp of sudden fright, that was near to a scream. The door opened more widely, but she still kept her hold upon the knob, and with the wind and the rain a dark figure came through the opening. She knew its outline, and was herself again.

Instantly she closed the door, and whispered "Father!"

"Yes, darling, thank God," answered the old man, and in the darkness they found each other, and the wet, naked arm, and the wet, clothed arm of the father were around his daughter, and as she nestled to him and felt his face with her hands and kissed him and drew him closer to her, the evil spirit passed for the time, and John Morliss was happy.

A long, silent embrace, and then Louise recovered from the shock of joy and silently guided her father into the parlor. She realized quickly that now was her time for action.

"Father," she whispered, "You must still be brave and strong and quick. You are free now, but they may come to find you here. I won't ask you anything now, dear, except if you are strong and well, and before you tell me, drink this," and she handed him a little flask of brandy. The old man put it eagerly to his lips and drank deep.

"I am strong and well now, darling," he said. "A little scratch on the foot is nothing. Tell me what to do."

Louise pulled down the shade and drew the portière between the hall and the parlor, and then lighted the lamp and *turned it low*.

As the light revealed the pitiable, ragged, dripping old man, she ran again to his arms.

"Father—poor old dada," she said; "I did not know it would be so hard. You must have suffered so terribly."

"I am good for another fight, dear," said her father. "Nothing is hard now."

Then quickly Louise told him of Stelwyn's promises, and how he must go there at once, and that, once there, he would be safe from all pursuit.

"And here," she continued, "are towels and clothes and shoes. Take off those hateful rags and rub yourself dry and dress as quickly as possible, and I will wait for you in the dining-room."

"But, Louise," whispered the old man, "your mother?"

"Mother is sound asleep, dear, and she knows nothing of this. When you are fairly away I will tell her. Throw down the old rags anywhere. When they are found you will be safe."

"But you, dear—if they are found here?"

"Nonsense, father! Of course everyone knows that you would come here first. Now hurry, dear. *Au revoir.*" And the girl, brimful of happiness and hope, glided through the portières into the dining-room and waited in the darkness.

Morliss was very weary, but the inspiring courage of his daughter and the stimulating effect of the brandy had given him new life.

He looked at the lounge for an instant, as if he felt that to lie down there and drop to sleep would be sweet relief and release from all care. But he resolutely turned from the suggestion, and, quickly stripping himself in the dim light of the low-turned lamp, he rubbed his body dry and warm and began to put on the clothes which Louise had laid out for him. His foot was somewhat bruised and lacerated, but he drew the sock over it and bravely put on the shoe.

"No time to waste for such trifles now," he thought. "I must hurry out of this."

He had put on his underclothing, his shirt and trousers, and his shoes, and was picking up his vest, when, as he turned toward the hall, he saw the portières slowly separate, and his wife, in her night-dress, stood in the opening. In one *swift flash* he saw the gleam of those dark eyes in the deathly

white face; he heard a wild scream, and he leaned quickly over the table and blew out the lamp.

What happened then happened instantaneously. It was finished in far less time than the time of telling.

In the noise of the storm neither Louise nor her father had heard the stealthy, shoeless approach. When that sudden cry rang out Louise rushed from the dining-room, to see her father bending over the lamp, and the white figure of her mother entering the room. Then, in the darkness, with a stifled exclamation, thinking swiftly and only that another scream must be prevented, she sprang with outstretched hand toward her mother.

Mrs. Morliss turned sharply and swayed backward. Her foot trod upon her night-dress at the instant that Louise came upon her with hands extended, vaguely trying to stifle a second scream. The mother clutched frantically at her daughter, and the daughter's hands seized the mother's head. They went down together with their combined weight and the impetus of Louise's rush. There was another scream, and the invisible demon of misfortune laughed in the wild laughter of the storm.

Mrs. Morliss half turned her head in falling, and the waiting instrument of destiny did its work. The sharp metal point of one of the low andirons met her left temple and crushed it, and pierced it deep into the brain.

There was a groan, a plaintive cry, "Louise!" a sudden, strong lifting and dull fall, and then—silence, except for the dreary wail of the wind.

Louise was instantly on her feet and trying to help her mother to rise.

"Are you hurt, dear?" she whispered, and her hand that felt her mother's face encountered something that went through her like an electric shock.

"Father," she cried, quickly, "light the lamp. Mother has struck her head against something. She is bleeding. Hurry! The matches are right here on the mantel." And while Morliss, with shaking hand, strove to find the matchbox, Louise lifted the unresisting head to her lap, and, bending over it, strove to wipe away the blood with her handkerchief, whispering broken words of affection that faltered and became like sobs as they met with no response.

*"Oh, Louise! I cannot find those matches," said the old*

man's trembling voice, and the girl gently rested her mother's head upon the floor, and, springing to her feet, seized a match and struck it with a firm hand. As the light flashed out, the ghastly white faces of the father and daughter were revealed to each other, and Louise, with deft fingers, lifted the lamp chimney and lighted the lamp.

The old man gave one glance at the silent figure stretched out on the floor, and then staggered to the lounge and covered his face with his hands and groaned in agony.

The wind and the rain and the invisible demon laughed in harmony with his groan.

Louise, with tight lips and wide eyes, was bending over her mother.

"Father!" she said, sharply, "help me lift her to the lounge. *Father!*" And at the sound of that fierce call, Morliss sprang to his feet and took his wife in his strong arms and laid her gently on the lounge.

"Let me run for a doctor!" he said, wildly.

"No, father," answered the girl, with intense steadiness in her voice, as she raised her white face from her mother's breast. No. No doctor can help us, father. Mother is dead."

The man had felt it when the lamp was lighted, and his first glance had shown him that set, rigid face and the ghastly wound in the temple, and yet the spoken word seemed to bring the terrible truth into his mind with the shock of a new fact. He staggered to the lounge and sank on his knees by the side of the woman whom he had loved and hated. The exhausted nerves, worn by days of anxiety and sleepless nights of watchful and severe labor, and by his last fierce fight for freedom, gave way, and the strong man bowed his head upon his dead wife and sobbed and cried like a child.

The storm sang its fierce, wild song around that fatal room. The rain lashed the glass, and the gusty wind shrieked in fury and sank into moaning, and within the room there was no sound but the hard, wrenching sound of a man's sobbing.

Yes, one other sound: the slow ticking of the little clock. It was not loud, but Louise heard it. She stood by her father's side looking down at her mother's white face, and her fingers were twisting and twining around each other. *She counted the seconds that the clock ticked off.*

It was well for her that her father had broken down. His anguish soon brought the tears to her dry eyes, and in a few moments she was kneeling beside him with an arm around his neck and was crying with him, and as her tears relieved the tension of her own feelings she began to remember his danger and the work for him that was still unfinished. The clock struck the half-hour. She turned and looked at it. Yes, it was possible and true, that only thirty minutes had passed since her father had entered the house.

With all the strength of her strong will she stood up and said, quietly: "Come, father, dear, you must go now. You remember the place. Mr. Stelwyn will be waiting for you. You have worked hard for freedom, father. Come—a little more courage now," and she gently tried to raise him.

The shattered old man slowly turned a haggard, weary face toward his daughter, and said: "Let them come and take me, Louise. I can go no further—after this."

"Father," said the girl, with a little, uncontrollable choke in her voice, "we cannot help what *has* happened. You love me, father. Be brave again for my sake. I have only you now, dear. You must be safe, or else your little girl will die." Her arm went about his neck again and her lips met his lips.

Morliss slowly regained his feet, and shivered as if with cold.

"Put on your coat and vest, dear," said the girl, and she handed them to him.

Mechanically he obeyed, then suddenly dropped into a chair and covered his face with his hands.

"I cannot go, Louise," he groaned. "How can I go and leave you here with—. No, dear; I must stay. I am so sick and tired, Louise, that I don't care for the prison. I could not find my way to Stelwyn's rooms to-night. Let them come—let them come and take me! Let them try me for"— He glanced one instant at the lounge and turned quickly away and threw out his hands with a despairing gesture. "Let them hang me. They will, Louise—they'll hang me now," and again he buried his face and sobbed. It had all been too much for him. He was no longer a man; he was a child.

The girl's brave heart failed for an instant. She heard the wail of the storm. She saw her dead mother on the

lounge, and her father, for whom all had been planned and endured, suddenly reduced to a helpless wreck. She tottered and rested one hand on the table, and a great cry of agony rose to her lips, but no sound of that cry came from her. She was instantly brave and determined once more.

"Come, father," she said, gently and firmly, as she took him by the hand; "you are to do as I say. I am going with you to Mr. Stelwyn's."

The old man stood up with a bewildered look, and Louise quickly brought his mackintosh and hat from the hall.

"Put these on," she said, and he obeyed silently.

She got her own cloak and hat and put them on.

Her father said nothing, but looked stupidly at her as she made ready. She glanced about the room, then stooped and kissed the cold lips of her mother.

"Father," she said, and the old man came mutely and bent low and kissed his wife for the last time.

"Now, father," said the girl, "you must live and be free for my sake."

She took his unresisting arm and looked once more about the room. Then she turned the light low and led her father to the front door. She opened the door, and, heedless of the wind and the rain, stopped to adjust the latch so that it could be opened from the outside. Still firmly holding the dazed old man, she led him out of the house, closed the door behind her, and together they started out into the storm and the darkness.

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE GENTLEMAN IN A TRYING POSITION

Mr. Stelwyn, waiting and watching in his comfortable library, listening to the sound of the storm and the snores of old Colon, became expectant at midnight, anxious at twelve-fifteen, and irritably nervous or nervously irritable at twelve-thirty.

For, after the clock struck twelve, he began to think of the possibility of failure, and the thought had a crescendo movement. It was peculiarly annoying—this persistent and growing dread—for it was to him nearly a stranger. Very rarely had he experienced failure in an undertaking, and he was inclined to blame anyone else for his own nervous anxiety.

He walked back and forth in the room, smoking furiously, then sat down and listened, then rose and resumed his walk. At last, feeling the need of a vent for his feelings, he went into the hall and stirred the slumbering negro with his foot.

"Wake up, you black scarecrow," he said. "Why in the devil are you snoring here, when I want you?"

"Yaas, Mas'r Jack," said Colon, sitting up and rubbing his eyes. "Ah done heah'd Mistah Morleh come in, but ah reckoned you's want to talk wif 'im, so ah kept still."

"You old sarcophagus," said Jack, with a laugh; "shake your musty bones together and keep your ears open, and jump for the door at the first tap. Mr. Morliss will be here in a few moments now," and Jack continued to himself, as he returned to the library, "I hope to heaven he will."

Back and forth, back and forth, from the door through the hall and the library and again to the door, he walked, pausing each time at the door to listen for an instant, and then, disappointed, to turn and relieve himself by swearing at the stolid old negro.

It was nearly one o'clock when a sharp rap at the door sounded through the silent hall.

Old Colon was preparing to open the door cautiously, as directed, but Stelwyn was there on the instant, and he seized his old servant by the collar and swung him back into the chair.

"Keep still, till you're wanted," he said, sharply, and he opened the door himself.

The door was on the north side of the building, and the storm was driving from the southeast. The lamp-post at the corner threw a dim light toward the entrance.

Jack saw two figures—a man and a girl—and he knew the girl.

In the flash of the instant he was surprised and recovered from his surprise.

"Please come in," he said, and he found the right hand of Louise and drew her in, and with her the old man, whom she still held by the arm. He closed the door.

"Come into the library, where we can see our way," he continued, as he guided them through the hall. "Miss Morliss, I congratulate you and your father, but I had not hoped to see *you* to-night."

"No, Mr. Stelwyn," said Louise.

His hand was on her arm as he led them through the long hall, and something in her voice made him drop his hand for the instant.

"Is there something wrong?" he asked, anxiously. They had reached the door to the library, and Louise did not answer for the moment.

"Please sit down," said Jack, as he ushered them into the lighted room. "We have lots of time. Mr. Morliss, I have only known you by reputation, but I am very glad to have the opportunity of entertaining an artist who has done so much that I have admired."

It seems hardly credible, in view of what had passed that night, but truth requires the record to state that the old man quickly extended his hand and said, with a flush of pleasure: "Mr. Stelwyn, I thank you for your kind appreciation. I—" He suddenly paused, as Stelwyn released his hand, and as he dropped into the chair behind him, he said: "I—am not well to-night, Mr. Stelwyn—a pretty hard *fight*, you know. Louise, will you tell Mr. Stelwyn?"

*Louise had stood silently waiting while Stelwyn was shaking hands with her father. Now she darted quickly to his*

chair and knelt beside him and took his hand, just as Stelwyn had seen her take it during the trial.

But he saw something that he had not seen at the trial. He saw, as Louise threw back her cloak, that the whole front of her dress was stained with a dark red stain.

Before Louise could speak to her father, Stelwyn sprang forward. "Miss Morliss," he said, as he leaned over her, "are you wounded? What has happened?"

"No, I am well, Mr. Stelwyn," said the girl, quickly, as she looked up into his eager face. She turned at once to her father. "I will tell Mr. Stelwyn, father," she said, gently, as she stood up.

Jack instantly had a chair for her, and feeling that something strangely terrible was to come, he lifted his hand as she sat down and said: "Please, one moment, Miss Morliss."

He stepped quickly to the sideboard in the adjoining room and brought a decanter of brandy and a glass. He could not wait for Colon to wait on him.

"Mr. Morliss," he said. "Please drink this," and the old man looked up and said: "Thank you, Mr. Stelwyn," and swallowed the glassful at a gulp.

Jack poured a little more brandy into the glass and diluted it with water and brought it to Louise.

"Please drink this," he said.

"No, thank you, Mr. Stelwyn, I do not need it," she answered.

"But I beg you to drink it," Jack said earnestly. "Will you please take it—to oblige me"—and Louise took the glass and drank the fiery liquid with a gasp or two—and then Jack called—"Cole."

"Yaas, Mas'r Jack," said the servant, appearing at the door with staring white eyes.

"Go into the bedroom and shut the door and stay there until I call you."

"Yaas, Mas'r Jack," and old Cole trudged off to his mysterious seclusion.

So Stelwyn had managed to stave off and delay the telling of the news which he was consumed with anxiety to hear, but which he felt would be hard for Louise in the telling.

He stood now, waiting. It must be told, and Louise

looked up and said, simply: "Mr. Stelwyn, my mother is dead."

Jack started and instantly thought of the blood stains on the girl's dress, and involuntarily he glanced at Mr. Morliss.

"Tell him how it happened, Louise," said the old man wearily. "It was an awful accident, Mr. Stelwyn."

Louise slowly and with frequent pauses, but with scarcely a tremor in her low voice, told of the sudden fate that had overtaken her mother, just when her father had escaped. "Poor father was so worn and exhausted that the shock was terrible to him," she said. "I came here with him, Mr. Stelwyn, just to make sure that he found the place."

Jack had felt deeply the suffering of the young girl now so dear to him, suppressed as it was under the steady, quiet voice and manner. He longed with all his intense nature to comfort or cheer her, but what comfort or cheer could avail in such a case? He looked at Morliss, sitting with head bowed in his hands while his daughter told the story, and with the inspiration of love he found the only cue.

"Miss Morliss," he said earnestly, "do you remember that you once asked me to wait and let you thank me some other time for what I had been trying to do for your father. Now, will you please wait and let me show you by my new and stronger devotion to—Mr. Morliss how deeply I sympathize with you—in this awful misfortune. I feel as if words were the weakest of comforters at such a time. Won't you please try to believe all that I feel without my—useless attempts to express it in words. Let me rather show it by devoting all that I am and all that I have to making your father free and honored—and perhaps—sometime—happy?"

Jack's voice was not as steady as the girl's. It trembled and faltered toward the end, and he turned his head away for an instant as he finished.

Louise had endured her own suffering with resolute repression—but the quaver in Stelwyn's voice, the manifest intensity of his feelings, brought sympathetic tears to her eyes.

She rose from her chair and Mr. Morliss also stood up.

"Mr. Stelwyn," she said, "I know and feel all that you would say without words. If you can save father—I think I shall be happy again."

She had unconsciously admitted that she felt that Jack's interest was in her personally. Stelwyn recovered from his momentary weakness and faced the situation with the cool determination of the man of action.

"Your father shall be surely safe, Miss Morliss," he said.

Stepping to the door he called Colon and then quickly continued.

"Mr. Morliss, our little scheme of escape has an unpleasant feature that I trust you will not object to. I want to take you away with me to-night—but to do it safely you must be disguised: You will pardon me for the little temporary annoyance I put you to?"

"I will do anything you tell me and submit to anything you think best, Mr. Stelwyn," said the old man humbly.

"It will only be for a few days," said Jack, cheerfully. "Old Cole here knows all about it. You can trust him. Please let him fix you up while I am out. Miss Morliss," he turned toward Louise, "you shall see your father again—and see him safe—in two weeks at the latest. While you are saying good-by to him for this little outing please excuse me. I will get my coat to escort you back."

"But, Mr. Stelwyn," said Louise, "you must not go back with me. It is not necessary. I am not afraid. It is so late. They—they may be looking for father already."

"Only half-past one," said Jack. "We have two hours and more. You mustn't interfere with organized plans, Miss Morliss. I shall be ready to go with you in a moment. Cole, come out here and help me into my coat," and Jack went into the hall, followed by the old negro.

He had spoken pleasantly but with a certain manner of command that had its effect. Louise felt a sense of relief, as if some portion of her long-carried burden of responsibility had been lifted from her, and she turned to her father with thought of him only and with new encouragement in her hopes.

Stelwyn seized Colon by the arm and dragged him down to the end of the hall near the outer door—and as far as possible away from the library.

"Do you understand everything, daddy?" he whispered.

"Yaas, Mas'r Jack. Ah'll dress him up so mah own wife would 'buse him."

"I'll be back here in about an hour, Cole. You can have him ready by that time?"

"Sho'ely, Mas'r Jack."

"Get my mackintosh from the closet there."

"Doan' yoe wan' to call Jimmy and drive de lady home in de cahge, Mas'r Jack?"

"No, you idiot. Get the coat. We're going to walk."

Stelwyn appeared at the library door enveloped in his rain coat and with hat in hand.

"Now, Miss Morliss," he said. "All ready?"

"All ready, Mr. Stelwyn," replied Louise. "Good-by for a few days, father, dear. Remember all I have told you, and don't worry about me."

She spoke cheerfully, and with one more embrace she turned and came quickly into the hall without looking back.

"I'll return in an hour, Mr. Morliss," said Jack. "Please let Cole get you ready. You needn't watch for me, Cole, I have the key."

The old negro held the door open for them to pass out, and closed it quickly behind them.

The storm was slowly abating. The wind blew with less fierceness and the rain was not so floodlike, although it still came down with unpleasant volume.

"Please take my arm, Miss Morliss," said Jack. "I am sorry that you have to walk through this weather, but you know it would not do to have my own carriage, much less to call a public cab. We are conspirators, and no one knows of our conspiracy except that old black-bird of mine—and he's as true as truth—and I didn't bring an umbrella because the wind blows so strong that we couldn't hold it—and moreover it might attract a stray policeman."

So Jack rattled along in talk that was meant principally to fill up the time while he was thinking what to do—and yet was serving its purpose of keeping the girl's mind fixed on the idea of the safety of her father.

Stelwyn was not entirely unconscious of the strangeness of the situation. He was escorting the girl whom he loved better than his life—through a heavy rain-storm—at half-past one in the morning—to leave her at a home which contained *only* the dead body of her mother—and yet he was talking cheerfully to her.

*This swiftly chased cloud of thought that repeatedly*

passed through his mind, shocked him in the passage—but seemed to leave him more determined to cling to that which he *knew* was for the best.

All the manly fight that was in him rose to this emergency. He thought while he talked, and yet he talked as if all his mind was in his words.

Louise, clinging to his arm, felt a sense of rest and relief, and as she listened to his cheering words, consciously helped him by resolutely shutting out the thought of that awful home, and trying to fix her mind upon the future of her father.

They had walked only a block, when Stelwyn said: "Miss Morliss, this is too bad. That light cloak of yours does not keep out the rain. I am protected and you are getting drenched. We will reverse this, if you please."

He stopped and instantly took off his heavy mackintosh with its cape and said: "Now, please let me have that cloak of yours. It is too wet to do you any good. This will be better."

"No, indeed, Mr. Stelwyn," said Louise. "I don't mind the rain. Please put on your coat."

"Not a bit," said Jack. "I am the chief conspirator. You must obey orders. Won't you let me shelter you with my plaidie against the cauld blast?"

Jack spoke with affected lightness, but the allusion in his words was not lost upon his companion.

Not knowing what better to do in her embarrassment, Louise took off her cloak and handed it to Stelwyn, and permitted him to cover her with the heavy water-proof coat.

"It's not a perfect fit, Mr. Stelwyn," she said, and she laughed a little, half-hysterical laugh. Yet she was going home to her dead mother, and that awful sight that flashed upon her eyes when she lighted the lamp two hours ago, had never been wholly absent from her since then.

"Never mind the style, Miss Morliss," said Jack, as he buttoned the loose coat around her neck. "There's no one to criticise us to-night. That old coat of mine is warm and dry—if it is ugly."

"But you will get the drenching now, Mr. Stelwyn," said Louise.

"I hope so," said Jack. "I need it. Take my arm again, please. Now, once more we proceed," and they walked

rapidly forward, Louise with the long, loose mackintosh flapping about her, holding to Stelwyn's arm, and Stelwyn with the cloak thrown carelessly over his shoulder like a medieval knight with the scarf of his lady.

They walked to the end of the second block in silence, and then Jack, who had been thinking very hard, said: "Miss Morliss, I shall be home again in about ten days—will you do as I ask you to do until then?"

Jack felt a little involuntary movement of the hand upon his arm, and then she said:

"What do you mean, Mr. Stelwyn? Why?"

"Why?" answered Jack. "Well, first for your father's sake—then for your own sake—and last of all—for—as a kindness to me."

"You know I will do anything for father's sake," she replied. "What shall I do, Mr. Stelwyn?"

"Do you know or call upon any of your neighbors on Norden Street?"

"Yes," said Louise slowly. "We know the people opposite our house—the Mortons."

"I am going with you to near the door of the Morton's house," said Jack—"and then, Miss Morliss, I shall wait until I have seen you safe into their house—and when that is accomplished—I shall go back and take your father to safety."

Again Jack felt the hand upon his arm. This time its clasp tightened a little for a moment, as if the girl dreaded to lose his protection, and that thought was too much for him. He continued hurriedly: "Or, after all, Miss Morliss, your father will be perfectly safe in my rooms for a few days—we can wait—and I will take him away later. We can manage it—I—I cannot bear to leave you—at such a time."

But Louise answered, with some pride in her voice, "Mr. Stelwyn, I will not be foolish or nervous as you fear. Of course everything must go on as you have planned. You must take father with you to-night. I will do whatever you tell me."

Jack walked for some distance without answering. He was steadyng himself. Louise now felt something different in the arm that her hand rested on—a swelling and tighten-

ing of the muscles—as Stelwyn involuntarily longed for some material adversary that he could knock out with a few sturdy blows.

But he said, quietly: "Miss Morliss, I only want to be assured that you have some one with you to-night. I will not leave you until I know that. Will you promise me that you will tell the Mortons just what has happened—your father's escape—his visit to the house—and the accident—and get some of them to come there with you. Of course," Jack continued, hurriedly, "you do not know where your father went after leaving the house. That need not be mentioned. And promise that early in the morning you will send for Mr. Garder to come to you. He will come—I know he will, and you can trust him with everything—except," Jack hesitated—"you had better not tell Garder about me. He will know the best to do—and—will you promise to do as he tells you until I return?"

They had turned the corner at Norden Street, and were walking slowly through the rain, along the plank sidewalk.

Jack had talked rapidly and with increasing earnestness. He checked himself suddenly, fearing that he might say *all* that he felt.

Louise, feeling his earnestness and his sincerity, and in her weariness glad to be guided by the positive instructions of this man whom she completely trusted, answered, "I will do just as you have told me, Mr. Stelwyn, and you shall not be ashamed of the way I do it. I understand what you mean. It is all for father's sake."

"Yes," said Jack, with a deliberate lie, "all for your father's sake."

They had nearly reached the cottage. A dim light was visible along the edges of the parlor window shade—from the lamp which Louise had left burning. The girl gave a little gasp of pain and her hand tightened on Stelwyn's arm as she saw the light and remembered what was in that room. Then she instantly said: "I will be brave, Mr. Stelwyn, I am a great deal braver than you think. I will do everything that you told me, and you will save father—won't you?"

"Only two weeks, Miss Morliss," said Jack with a desperate effort to steady his voice, "and you shall see your father safe and well."

"That promise will be enough to live on," she replied. "Now, Mr. Stelwyn, you must take back your 'plaidie,' and let me have my cloak."

Jack did not dare to answer, but he helped her take off the mackintosh, and he put the cloak over her shoulders, and she turned to him and held out her hand and said, cheerfully, "Good-by. Please don't think I won't be brave."

As Jack took her hand he was filled with an almost unconquerable longing to take her in his arms, to tell her of all that he thought and felt—to ask her to go with him to Mexico—to go anywhere—but he only said, slowly: "Good-by. You are the bravest and noblest little woman in the world."

Then as Louise quickly withdrew her hand and turned away her head he continued in a different tone. "I will wait here, Miss Morliss, until I have seen the Mortons open their door to you—and after that I shall see you again in about a week—and I shall bring you good news."

She only said once more: "Good-by," and without waiting for the answer she ran quickly across the street and up the steps of the Morton's house, and Jack heard the bell ring long and steadily.

Soon a light appeared in the house and in a few moments the door was opened and he heard a few exclamations of surprise—and then he saw the slight, erect figure of Louise pass in through the lighted doorway—and the door was closed.

With a long sigh of relief and regret he turned and hurried back to his rooms.

## CHAPTER XXII

### A FRIEND IN NEED

On Friday afternoon at about two o'clock Ralph Sconer, coming from a hard morning's work at the office, stepped into the restaurant which he usually patronized for luncheon, and having ordered some fried oysters and a cup of coffee, took the noon issue of the *Compos Daily Searcher*, which the waiter handed him, and proceeded to glance idly down its columns. In a moment he started. His attention became fixed and he read rapidly through a short paragraph, then stood up and beckoned to the waiter, "Please countermand that order," he said. "I—had forgotten something. I will—come back later"—and with the paper in his hand, he hurried out of the restaurant and walked up the street at a pace that was nearly a run.

The paragraph that had spoiled Ralph's appetite was headed: "*A Daring Escape and a Terrible Tragedy*," and it read as follows: "During the severe storm of last night a convict at the penitentiary, named John Morliss, effected his escape by sawing through the bars of the window of his cell with a file, and lowering himself to the court-yard of the prison. How he escaped the vigilance of the sentries and managed to scale the wall that surrounds the prison enclosure, is not yet ascertained. A pursuit was at once organized and a visit of the officers to the former home of Morliss on Norden Street at eight o'clock this morning, resulted in a ghastly discovery. The wife of the escaped convict was lying dead from the effect of a fearful wound in the left temple. A number of people were in the house. The daughter of the convict bravely came from her room when the officers arrived and admitted that her father had been there shortly after midnight and stated that her mother in rushing to meet him had fallen and struck her head upon an andiron. The young lady also stated that her father had left the house immediately."

after the accident and she had no knowledge of his present place of hiding.

"Careful inquiry at the penitentiary has brought out the fact that the file with which Morliss effected his escape was concealed in a book sent to him by a friend and former employer of the convict, a young man of some prominence in the wholesale business district of the city.

"The officers report that they have the escaped prisoner fairly located and expect to round him up and return him to the prison within a few days."

After partially recovering from the first shock of this astounding intelligence, Ralph was annoyed by two thoughts, as he hurried along toward Norden Street. He could not doubt that he was himself the young business man referred to and yet how was it possible that a file could have been concealed in one of the books that he had sent unopened from the bookstore, direct to the warden? But the second and the more distressing thought, was the reflection that this terrible calamity had befallen Louise and that she had not sent for him.

He dwelt upon these two unaccountable facts to such an extent that he nearly lost thought of Louise herself and the suffering that she must have endured. When he went up the steps of the cottage he was actually inclined to feel more injured than sympathetic.

He remembered the situation enough to touch the bell lightly as one does at a house of mourning—and was astonished when the door instantly opened to the extent of eighteen inches only, and a small boy with a shock of red hair, stood squarely in the opening.

"Can I see Miss Morliss?" asked Ralph.

"No, sir. Ye can't see Miss Morliss," replied Sammy, with determination in his voice and his attitude. "Miss Morliss is layin' down and she's not to be disturbed."

"But," said Ralph, hesitating, "if you would tell her ——"

"Tell her nothin'," replied the boy. "We don't want to see no reporters and we ain't makin' no statement."

The smart boy had recognized Ralph and had already shrewdly guessed that Louise did not like him. Therefore Sammy did not like him. Had the caller been Stelwyn, the case would have been different to Sammy.

*In another moment the door would have been closed in*

Ralph's face—but a voice from the hall said: "Wait a moment, Sammy, it's Mr. Sconer, isn't it?" and an elderly lady appeared behind the small boy.

"Yes, how do you do, Mrs. Morton," said Ralph. "I—had just learned of this sad news—and—"

"Come in, Mr. Sconer," said the lady. "Poor Louise is quite worn out, but I think she would be glad to see you."

Louise from her room upstairs heard the conversation and recognized Ralph's voice. Though the thought of his sympathy and his questions made her nerves quiver very unpleasantly, still she could not be so unkind as to refuse to see him. She came slowly down the stairs just as Sammy announced his positive orders.

"Never mind, Sammy," she said, "I will see Mr. Sconer. Please walk into the dining-room, Ralph."

As he passed the parlor door Ralph noticed that the portières were closely drawn. It instantly impressed him with the reality of the tragedy that had taken place.

As he sat down he said: "Louise, I am awfully sorry. Will you tell me how it all happened?"

Louise sat with her head resting on one hand. She was very pale and her eyes showed traces of recent weeping.

"Ralph," she said, almost entreatingly, "please don't ask me to tell you—now. Father has escaped—and mother"—she stopped and shuddered a little—and covered her eyes with her hand as if to shut out some awful sight.

Ralph sat silent for a moment. He was sincerely sorry for the girl, but he felt as though he must learn something about it all. He could not understand why she was unwilling to tell him. How could he help or comfort her if he did not know what had happened?"

"Louise," he said gently, "what time did your father come here?"

"At midnight," answered the girl, still with her eyes covered.

Ralph remembered the unpleasant relations of Morliss and his wife, and still following his quest he continued blunderingly: "Did she—did they have any words, Louise?"

She quickly took her hand from her face. Ralph was startled. Through her tears he saw her eyes as he had never seen them before. They reminded him of her mother's eyes when the angry mood was at its height. But the fierce light

faded almost instantly—and she said, quietly: “No, Ralph. There was not a word spoken.”

She leaned her forehead on both hands and waited patiently.

“Do you know where your father is now?” asked Ralph.

Without raising her head she replied: “No, I have no idea—but I know that he is safe.”

“Did you know, Louise, that I had been accused of helping him to escape?”

She partly raised her hands and looked at him from beneath them. With a slight tone of sarcasm, she said: “I am sure, Ralph, I do not see how anyone could ever suspect *you* of such a thing.”

“Louise, when all this happened, *why didn’t* you send for me at once?”

She answered wearily, without raising her head: “Ralph, Mr. Garder came at six o’clock this morning. He has done everything and attended to everything for me. I did not need you. I did not want—to disturb you.”

At this moment the door-bell rang and almost immediately Mr. Garder was in the room.

He glanced at Ralph sharply, walked around the table and laid his hand lightly on Louise’s head, and with his kind eyes looking into her face, he said: “My dear, you are very naughty and disobedient.” Then, without waiting for an answer, he turned to Ralph and said: “Mr. Sconer, this little girl is under the doctor’s care for a time and he has forbidden her seeing anyone.”

Ralph was so entirely taken by surprise that he rose quickly, with a face that had grown crimson. “My dear”—“This little girl!” he murmured to himself. Such expressions from the old lawyer! He felt as if he were dreaming.

Louise, seeing his embarrassment and feeling a little pity for him, said: “I am really too tired to talk to-day, Ralph.”

“Therefore don’t attempt it, young lady,” said Mr. Garder. “Good-afternoon, Mr. Sconer,” and Ralph, the unfortunate, well-meaning Ralph, turned to depart with an expression that was the combined result of astonishment, mortification, and real regret.

But before he had reached the hall Louise came and held out her hand and said: “Good-by, Ralph, I am sorry to seem unkind, but I—promised to mind Mr. Garder—for a time.”

"Oh!—yes," said Ralph. "Very well. Good-by"—and he took her hand limply.

Sammy was grinning silently when he opened the door for Ralph to pass out—and with a quick, backward glance to be sure of safety—he hissed in a sharp whisper that reached Ralph's ears—"Did you ever get left?"—then promptly closed the door.

"Louise, dear," said Mr. Garder, "where is Mrs. Morton?"

"I think she went upstairs, Mr. Garder. She thought I would like to see Ralph."

"But she was mistaken, wasn't she? Never mind, little girl—don't protest—the doctor knows what is best."

"But who is this doctor that you talk about so much?" asked Louise, with a full knowledge of what the answer would be.

"I am the doctor," said the old lawyer—"and you have promised to do just as I tell you."

"How did you know that I had promised?" asked Louise quickly. She was so tired and nervous, that she half feared that she had told him of her conversation with Stelwyn at parting.

"Doctors know as many things as lawyers," said Garder with a smile. "When the doctor came early this morning you told him you were ready to obey all his orders—and now we will see how you meant it."

Mr. Garder took a little vial from his pocket, poured out a teaspoonful into a glass and filled the glass with water.

"The doctor orders you to drink this, and then to go upstairs and go to bed. Your supper will be sent up to you at the proper time and you are to eat it and then go to sleep again. Not one bit of worry about anything! I shall be here and Mrs. Morton will be here, and if you want anything you are to ring the little bell on your table. To-morrow morning you will be fresh and bright again—so the doctor says. Now, no arguments. Take your medicine, dear."

He held the glass to her lips. "No heel-taps," he said—and she drained the glass.

"So! That's a good girl. Good-night, daughter." He bent and kissed her cheek, and Louise looked up and said with a little tearful smile, "I will be good, doctor—Good-night," and she ran up to her room.

"That hare-brained Jack!" said Garder to himself as he

sat down. "If anything goes wrong with this little girl—I'll kill him—damned if I won't."

Mrs. Morton came down at once and said—in an apologetic tone: "Perhaps I did wrong, Mr. Garder. I admitted Mr. Sooner—but I knew he was an old friend of Louise's—and I thought she might be glad to see him."

"Quite so, Mrs. Morton," said Garder, with an abstracted manner. "You did quite right—but—he is gone now. Is Louise going to bed?"

"Yes, Mr. Garder—she said you told her to go to bed and to sleep and she would do just as you ordered."

Mrs. Morton was impressed by the attention which this prominent lawyer was giving to her neighbors. She was naturally a kind-hearted woman, and she had been always fond of Louise, but now she felt proud to be the one selected to assist Mr. Garder.

"You have been very kind, Mrs. Morton. Louise would have been helpless without you last night. You know I feel as if she were my own daughter, and as if it were my privilege to thank you for what you have done."

"I'm sure I wish I could have done much more for the dear girl," said Mrs. Morton, with increasing respect—and she added—"I am so glad for her that she has some one like you, Mr. Garder, to look out for her. I am sure all will go well. You don't expect any trouble about—about her father—do you?"

"Not the slightest trouble, Mrs. Morton," said the lawyer. "I knew nothing about her father's escape—but I have always believed that he was innocent of the crime for which he was convicted—and I am very glad that he is out of prison."

The old man knew that Mrs. Morton would soon set the ball rolling and create a sentiment in favor of Morliss that would spread from her acquaintances to their acquaintances—and so onward until society was leavened with sympathy for the father of Louise."

Mrs. Morton said: "Do you know, Mr. Garder, I always told my husband that I didn't believe Mr. Morliss could have done such a thing. I am so glad to hear that he was innocent."

Mr. Garder smiled. The ball had started fairly well.

"Mrs. Morton," he said, "I want to ask a little more help from you. I have arranged everything for the funeral to

morrow morning. You agree with me, don't you, that for Louise's sake it should be as soon as possible?"

"You are quite right, Mr. Garder. She will recover much quicker when it is all over with."

"I am very glad that you endorse my opinion, Mrs. Morton. The service will be at eleven o'clock to-morrow. Very private, you understand. Only your family—and such few friends as you think best to notify. I leave that to your better judgment. Will you kindly help me?"

"I shall be glad to do everything I can do, Mr. Garder," said Mrs. Morton, proud to be placed in charge of a funeral.

"After the burial, Mrs. Morton, I shall take Louise home with me. Don't you think it will be much better for her away from the associations of this house? My housekeeper is a nice old lady and she will look after the poor girl. Don't you think that is best?"

"It certainly is the best, Mr. Garder—and very generous of you."

"For to-night, Mrs. Morton, you have been so kind already that I regret to ask any more of you—could you arrange to have a little supper cooked and sent up to Louise at seven o'clock and would your family spare you to sleep in the room adjoining hers? I will stay here through the afternoon and again in the evening, and will come early in the morning—but I should be very glad to have her know that there was someone like yourself whom she knew and trusted, near her through the night."

"Certainly, Mr. Garder," said Mrs. Morton. "I am only too glad to help her so much. I wish you would tell me of more that I could do. If you will excuse me I will run across the street and get everything ready. I will come back with the supper for Louise at half-past six and then you can be relieved."

"Thank you, Mrs. Morton," said the wily old lawyer, as he rose and shook hands with her. "I knew I could count on your kind heart."

When the neighborly matron had gone Mr. Garder sat for some time silently thinking. Then he got up and went quietly into the hall and softly called "Sammy!"

The boy came into the dining-room and in obedience to his employer's order, seated himself in a chair near Mr. Garder, and then for the rest of the afternoon, the old lawyer

relieved his own mind and astonished and delighted the heart and soul of Sammy, by telling the boy a succession of stories of adventure, in which cow-boys, grizzly bears, detectives, Indians, trappers, and explorers were the leading characters. Sammy had never read anything so absorbingly interesting. The old man had a well of romance in his make up, and only deep borings could reach it—but when touched it seemed inexhaustible.

They were both so deeply engaged that the door bell rang twice before Mrs. Morton was admitted with the supper for Louise.

When Mr. Garder called in the morning Louise was somewhat refreshed after her long though broken sleep.

She quietly assented to all the arrangements that had been made, only requesting that Ralph should be notified of the time of the funeral.

The lawyer was put to some trouble to induce her to accept his proposition that she should come and live at his house. Louise had a strong feeling of independence, and while she had grown to love the old man who had been so kind to her, and whom she felt to be the best friend of her father's champion, it was not natural for her to accept everything when she did not feel as if she could return anything.

At last Mr. Garder said: "My dear, you have promised to obey me, you remember, but I will not insist on this point. You will make me very happy if you come and very unhappy if you do not come. I want to feel that you are really my daughter, for a little time. Won't you humor the old man's fancy? When your own father comes I shall have to surrender you to him."

His unmistakable earnestness and sincerity were too much for the girl's affectionate heart. She yielded, and at Mr. Garder's request she busied herself during the early morning in packing up such personal belongings as she might need for the immediate future. "I will send for the trunk this afternoon," said the lawyer.

After the simple services were over and the last person had left the house, Mr. Garder locked the outer door and put the key in his pocket.

"If I can manage it," he said to himself grimly, "she shall never spend another night in that house." Then he took his

seat beside Louise, in his own carriage, and they drove to the cemetery.

Having accepted Mr. Garder's hospitality, the young woman did all that she knew to show her gratitude to her new protector. When they reached his house and he left her in the care of his housekeeper she soon won the affection of the old lady, and without trespassing or intruding upon her sacred domain she humbly admired and assisted. Garder had positively refused to allow her to go to the office, and she as positively refused to go to her room to lie down.

When he returned to dinner she met him at the door with the welcome of a daughter, and the old man was happy.

On Sunday they drove together to the house on Norden Street and Louise, though with an aching heart, busied herself bravely in arranging everything, so that the house could be closed for a time. She encouraged herself by saying repeatedly: "A few weeks and father will be free and safe—and then we will be here together again."

Monday morning she went to the office with Mr. Garder, and the work proceeded as usual, except that now the old man never said "Miss Morliss" unless some one else was present, but it was always "Louise," or "little girl," or "daughter."

In the afternoon Sammy brought in a telegram to Mr. Garder. It was from Stelwyn, and was dated from Guanajuato, Mexico.

It read: "Arrived safely. Everything in excellent condition. Will probably reach home Friday. Address me at — hotel."

The old man smiled inwardly as he read the telegram, but without any apparent change of features, he said: "A message from our friend Stelwyn, Louise."

The girl started and in spite of her self-control, the color flooded her face—but Mr. Garder did not seem to notice it.

"He is probably worried about those stocks of his," he said carelessly, as he tossed the telegram over to Louise.

He watched her with secret delight as she read it, and he saw the gleam of happiness in her eyes.

"I suppose we should answer the boy," he said. "Please take a blank and write it out for me, Louise. You have the address there. Just say: 'All your interests here gaining

ground rapidly. Am holding them.' How many words there, little girl?"

"Just ten," answered Louise, as she finished the message with a hand that trembled in spite of all her efforts to steady it.

"Very good," said the lawyer. "Let me see it, please."

He took the message and glanced at it, and then said, with a smile: "Don't you think, dear, you had better sign my name instead of your own?"

She had signed the telegram—"Louise Morliss."

"I must be wool-gathering to-day," said the girl with a face that was now crimson. "Please let me have that and I will rewrite it."

"Wait a moment," answered Garder, still looking at the message. "I think I will modify this. Please write: 'Interests here gaining ground. Am holding them. Come Friday sure.' There, that's ten words, isn't it?"

And while Louise was writing the new message with her head bent low over the table, the sly old lawyer put her first telegram in his pocket to give to Jack, if he should deserve it.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### SOME MEXICAN ITEMS

On the following Thursday night at eleven-thirty, Mr. Stelwyn stepped from the train at Compos, and with his grip in his hand walked to his rooms—a thing he had never done in his life before.

He was in a half-satisfied and half-anxious frame of mind. He had succeeded in establishing Louise's father in comfort and safety in a little village near Guanajuato, and so far as he knew, no one had suspected that the man who had traveled with him was not his negro servant. In that little village in the Cordilleras, where Stelwyn owned a large interest in a silver mine, the old gentleman whom he introduced to his agent as Mr. Random, an artist friend who had leased his mountain cottage for a few months, was looked upon by the simple inhabitants only as one of the freaky Americans who occasionally visited their picturesque little hamlet.

The change from black to white and from Mr. Morliss to Mr. Random had been effected in the City of Mexico—and the old artist had felt the pulse of a new life when Stelwyn went with him and purchased—at exorbitant prices—all the colors—brushes—canvas—stretchers and other paraphernalia that Morliss selected.

The escaped convict forgot his sufferings and his disgraces as the artist looked at the new world that allured his eager hand and eye with its wealth of color and its diversity of form.

When they had reached the village and had climbed up the steep mountain path to Stelwyn's cottage, and looked down at the hamlet below, with its broad plaza and its clustering, climbing houses, and its dark green foliage of orange and lemon trees—and up and around at the ragged mountain ridges with their scattering growth of cactus—Morliss was entranced, bewildered, too happy in the present to remember the past or to fear the future.

And so Stelwyn had left him, with an old Mexican woman to take care of the house and prepare his meals—and with the promise that in two weeks his daughter should join him.

Garder's telegram had been somewhat of a puzzler. Jack could not imagine what interests the old man had referred to, but he felt sure that Louise had seen his own message announcing that all was well—and he did not doubt that Garder would have told him if anything unfortunate had happened since the unfortunate night of his leaving Compos.

One thing in Garder's message had worried him to some extent—"Come Friday sure." It indicated that he was needed—and so by arduous exertions, called out by a longing that was new to him, he had managed to arrive on Thursday night just one week after that night of storm and stress. It seemed as if he had been away for months, and he dreaded among other dreads to find that old Cole had been unable to endure his long confinement, and had broken out to betray him.

There was no light and no sound within, as he cautiously unlocked the door—and entered the hall. He set down his grip and noiselessly felt his way into the dark library and stopped—and now he heard a sound. "Great Heaven!" he whispered. "If that has been going on for a week the whole block must have known of the trick."

Deep, portentous, resonant, and regular were the snores that came through the open door of Jack's bedroom.

He groped for the electric switch and turned it. Instantly the room was a blaze of light and the snores suddenly ceased. There was silence for a few moments, then a hurried movement in the bedroom, and he heard the old negro's voice in an awed undertone.

"Foh de Lawd's sake, wha's dat?" then another sound as Cole scrambled quickly out of bed. Jack turned off the light.

Silence again and then slowly and reflectively—"Yoe durned ole black niggah—yoe done been dreamin' again."

Jack waited until the old man had climbed into bed again, and then the light flashed out once more.

"Peah's like de debbil was in dat light," growled Cole as he scrambled out once more—and Jack said: "Pears like the devil was in you, you snoring old dog. You make noise enough to rouse the neighborhood."

"Mas'r Jack!" said the negro, coming to the door. "Ah'se

pow'fl glad to see yoe, Mas'r Jack"—he stopped to chuckle, and said: "Ah done heahed yoe comin' up de steps, Mas'r Jack—but ah was just layin' low and sayin' nothin' to spize yoe, Mas'r Jack."

"Yes, I know, you old liar. Get on your clothes and make up that bed for me. What's the news?"

"Ah haint done heahed no news, Mas'r Jack. Ah'se been in Mexico."

"Right you are, old man, I forgot. Well, has anyone disturbed you?"

"Ah'se been livin' ve'y lone, Mas'r Jack. Ah aint seen de sunshine nor de livin' face ob humanity foh cent'ries."

"Well, old beggar," said Jack, "it was pretty hard for you. Hurry up now and fix that bed and then skip home to your family," and Stelwyn found a flask and a glass and lit a cigarette, and then strolled out into the kitchen and surveyed the larder.

"For the Lord's sake!" he said. "Another day and the old pig would have broken out to find grub."

On the following morning at the early hour of eight, and with an unusual trepidation, Jack went to Mr. Garder's office. He found Sammy just unlocking the door.

"How de do, Mr. Stelwyn," said the boy. "Glad to see you back. How's things down in Mexico?"

"Mexico is all right, Sammy," replied Jack. "I suppose Mr. Garder won't be in for some time."

"He and Miss Morliss gen'ly comes about nine o'clock. Say—you knowed about Miss Morliss' mother—didn't you?"

"Yes," said Jack. "I read about it in the paper. How is the young lady, Sammy?"

"Well," said Sammy, reflecting for a moment, "you know, Mr. Stelwyn, she's one of those gals its hard to tell about. She's pretty quiet, and she seems kind o' paleish, you know, but I tell you she's got the nerve. She goes right along about business just the same, and you don't hear no ki-yi-ing. And the old man, he's taken such a shine to her that he's got her up to his big house."

"Indeed!" said Jack—and he added to himself, "God bless that stanch old man!"

He sat down in the private office feeling as if all the world were at his feet.

"Sammy," he said, "run down and get me a morning

paper. I haven't any change. Here's a two dollar bill, Sammy. You can keep the odds of it."

Mr. Garder and Louise arrived earlier than usual. In some mysterious and unnoticeable manner Louise had accelerated the breakfast—both in its inception and its completion. This was Friday and she expected—news.

As they entered the office, Sammy instantly said: "Good-morning! Mr. Stelwyn's here. He's been waitin' nearly an hour."

"So!" said the lawyer placidly. "Well, he might have to wait another hour or two. Hulloa, Jack, you're an early bird," he continued, as Stelwyn appeared. "Just arrived?"

"No," said Stelwyn, and without seeing the lawyer he took the hand of Louise and said, as he looked earnestly into her eyes: "Good-morning, Miss Morliss, I am very glad to see you again," and Louise knew instantly that all was well, for she swiftly reasoned that if there was bad news, Jack would not have said he was glad to see her. Or, perhaps she did not reason, but only felt. None the less, she knew.

Then Jack turned to Garder and shook hands and said: "How are you, old man?"

"Did you get my telegram, Jack?" said the lawyer, as they entered the private office.

"I did so, my lord," replied Stelwyn. He was on the point of inquiring about those mysterious interests, but he caught a half-lidded glance from Garder's eyes and so only said: "I was glad to hear such encouraging news. Tell me the details."

"The details will keep for a few hours, Jack," said the lawyer, looking at his watch—"but there's no one to keep my case in court unless I appear. Meet me at the club, Jack, at one o'clock, can you?" and before Jack could reply, and greatly to Jack's astonishment, he continued, "Louise, there's nothing for you to do until I get back. Perhaps Mr. Stelwyn will amuse you with an account of his trip to Mexico," and he hurried out of the room and went down the stairs chuckling in his own peculiar, silent fashion.

Jack turned toward Louise with a look of wonder and alarm.

"Does Garder know," he asked.

"I haven't told him one word, Mr. Stelwyn," answered the

girl. "Please tell me quick—is father safe and well? I know he is—but, please tell me all about it." She leaned forward with eager expectation, and Jack thought her eyes had never seemed so infinitely deep. He noted also that her cheeks had lost some of their fresh coloring, and the lines of her face were strained and anxious. A great throb of sympathy rose from his heart and choked him for the instant, as again there came to his mind—flash-like—as often and often in the past week—the remembrance of all that she had endured.

He stood up quickly and looked into the outer office, apparently to see where Sammy was—really to master himself—and then he brought a chair and sat down near Louise.

"Miss Morliss," he said, in his old cheerful tones, "your father is well and safe—as safe as can be. When I last saw him he waved me an adieu from the top of a rock, where he was seated, making a sketch of his cottage, with his queer old Mexican housekeeper standing under the shade of the big orange tree before the door."

"Dear old father!" said the girl softly, clasping her hands together. "Please tell me all about it, Mr. Stelwyn. Was it hard for him on the way? Was he sick? What did he say?"

Jack longed to ask her how it had been with her during this weary week. He had fretted and worried and sometimes cursed himself for leaving her on that fatal night—but he saw her now apparently well—and he felt unwilling to remind her by a question, of the tragedy that had cast such a gloom over their triumphant work for her father.

So while she listened with breathless interest, he told of the disguise—of old Colon locked up in the rooms—of how his coachman, Jimmy, had unsuspectingly driven them to the station—how Mr. Morliss had taken the two grips and had been hurried into the stateroom, and how he had told the porter that his own servant would look out for him, and had locked the door and made Mr. Morliss go to bed at once—and how soundly he had slept. How in the morning Jack had pretended to be too ill to be disturbed, and the porter had brought their meals to them through the whole trip. Jack did not mention the fee which that porter received. He described their arrival at Mexico and at Guanajuato and at the village where Mr. Morliss was established.

*"I think there is only one thing that would make him*

happier," said Jack, in conclusion. "I wonder if the same thing would make you happier?"

The girl's eyes sparkled with quick understanding. "And that one thing?" she said.

"Mr. Morliss appears to be very much attached to his daughter," said Jack, "and he is a long way from her."

"Oh! can I, Mr. Stelwyn?" she said. "Will it be safe?"

"If you have any regard for my conscience, Miss Morliss, you will certainly join him. I dared to promise that he should see you in less than two weeks."

"Then I will dare to keep your promise," answered Louise, quickly. "Please tell me when and how to go."

"Do you feel well and strong enough for such a journey?" asked Jack, with evident solicitude.

"Who? I?" answered the girl. "I am always well, Mr. Stelwyn. I have not been ill a moment this week. Oh! has it only been a week?" She shivered, and her face changed for an instant as the remembrance of that horror swept through her mind. "I will go as soon as you think best, Mr. Stelwyn," she said, quietly.

Jack had noted that swiftly-passing cloud of agony that swept across her face, and he said promptly and cheerfully: "Then by all means the sooner the better, Miss Morliss. If you can be ready to leave on the train to-morrow afternoon you will reach Guanajuato Wednesday morning. I will wire my agent—and he and your father will meet you. Remember, please, that for the time being your Mexican name will be Miss Random—Miss Louise Random. Can you go so soon?"

"I will go, Mr. Stelwyn," answered Louise, with spirit. "I will get the ticket to-day."

Jack wanted to insist upon doing this for her—he wanted to escort her to the train—he wanted to go to Mexico with her—but he did not suggest any one of his three wants. He was quite sure that she would not have been pleased with the suggestion. He only said: "It seems too bad that you should have to take that long journey alone. I wish for the moment that there was some friend of yours in our conspiracy."

Louise smiled a little as she answered: "I don't wish for any companion, Mr. Stelwyn. The journey will not seem long to me, and I am never afraid to be alone."

"But—have you—everything that you need—for such a short-notice trip? You know, Miss Morliss," Jack continued, "I made myself responsible to you for your father's safe arrival—and now I have promised him that you should join him safely. Is there nothing you will let me do to assist you in keeping my pledge?"

"There is nothing necessary, Mr. Stelwyn. It is a simple pledge for me to keep for you—as you pledge me to the thing I most longed for. I have only to pay for a ticket and get on the train—and get off at Guanajuato, and meet my father."

"What will you say to Mr. Garder?"

"I will only tell him that I want to go away for a few weeks. Perhaps he will understand." She hesitated and said: "Mr. Stelwyn, it will hurt him to have me go in that way. Wouldn't it be safe to tell him? He is the truest and dearest friend I have now."

She did not realize in her eagerness how much she was hurting Jack by those words. It did not make Jack angry at Garder nor jealous of him, as it might have made a lesser man, but it hurt him sorely. He only said:

"Miss Morliss, you shall tell Mr. Garder everything, if you wish to. He is one of the noblest men alive. I had always intended to tell him and have his advice at the last, but I had the foolish ambition to collect all the proofs of your father's innocence myself, and then, when that was done, I could put it all in Garder's hands—to insure the verdict."

Louise felt a sudden flash of shame and regret, and impulsively extending her hand, she said:

"Mr. Stelwyn, please forgive me. You know," she added, with an embarrassed smile, "we conspirators agreed to wait to thank each other."

With a strong effort Jack controlled himself as she drew away her hand, and said:

"I only hope the time for you to thank me will never come."

"I will not tell Mr. Garder," said Louise, hastily. "You are the better judge of that. When all is explained he will forgive me for leaving him, I am sure."

"Then here is the time-table," said Jack, finding a refuge in business explanations, and he showed Louise and marked for her the train and the time of leaving and arriving, and

wrote the name of his agent, "Mr. Caspar," at the top of the sheet.

"Caspar is on the lookout for a message," said Jack. "I will wire him at once. He will not fail to meet you, and your father will be with him. I will not try to see you again before you go—but in a few days or a few weeks at the most I shall see you in Mexico, with all the proofs complete to give your father the freedom of the world again. Please telegraph me as soon as you arrive, and don't forget to sign "Miss Random."

He took her hand once more and said "Good-by," and then hurried from the office.

Louise sat silently studying the time-table, but for a few minutes the figures had no meaning to her. She was thinking of other things. Then she investigated the contents of her pocketbook. She had one hundred and twenty dollars beside the still uncashed and unendorsed check which Stelwyn had sent her for the paintings.

Presently she got up and put on her hat and went into the outer office.

"Sammy," she said, "if Mr. Garder comes in, please tell him that I had to go out to get something I needed. I will be back in half an hour."

"Yes, ma'am," said Sammy, looking up from his absorbing book. "Say, Miss Morliss, let me go for you. I ain't very busy."

"No, thank you, Sammy; I shall have to do this myself."

She went straight to the ticket office and purchased a ticket and a half-section on the train for four-thirty the next afternoon.

At the club at one o'clock Jack found Garder waiting for him.

"Well, old man," said Stelwyn, with affected cheerfulness and secret dread, "tell me what that confounded telegram meant?"

"Yes, Jack," said the lawyer, slowly. "Sit down here and I will tell you." He leaned forward and laid one hand in a friendly way on the knee of his young companion and continued: "Jack, I wanted you here just to tell you—as your *oldest* and truest friend—that you are liable to make some *sad* mistake. Now don't protest, my boy," he said, as Jack involuntarily moved his head under that searching look. "I

don't want you to tell me what you have been doing, and I know you feel keenly enough what has happened. I know what you are working for, Jack, and I am ready to help you when you want me, but you shouldn't let your heart run away with your head—and one thing I must tell you, Jack," the old man lowered his voice and became sternly impressive in his manner, "that little girl whom you love and whom I love, Jack, shall never have another week of such suffering—if I am alive and can prevent it."

"My God! Garder," said Jack, involuntarily, "don't you know I would have died to save her that? Do you throw it at me, man? Do you think I have not felt it?"

"Yes, Jack; you have felt it. That is not the point. I am glad you have felt it. It may make you more careful of your plotting. Now—that's all, my boy—don't get excited. Only remember she is my daughter now, Jack. Come, we will go to lunch."

"Garder," said Jack, with some heat, "you are unfair to me. What I have done has been done for the best, and with all your wisdom you could not have prevented an accident."

"Come, come, Jack," said the lawyer, taking his arm. "If you are not careful you will tell me something. Let's go to lunch."

Stelwyn was perplexed and annoyed, but more than ever determined to go his own way, to play the lone hand, and finish the work he had undertaken without calling upon the assistance or advice of anyone.

The only thing that irritated him was Garder's assumption of prerogative with regard to Louise—that calm, masterful confidence that she would do just as he directed.

Jack said to himself: "Just wait until to-morrow, old man, and you will perhaps be dis-illusioned."

At half-past two Mr. Garder returned to his office, and found Louise very busy over her books.

She looked up and said, quickly, and with a nervous manner, as if she wished to have it over with: "Mr. Garder, please don't be vexed with me, but I want to go away to-morrow, for a few weeks."

For one instant the old lawyer's brows contracted with anger—not at her—but at Jack. Then they were smooth and placid again, and he sat down leisurely in his arm-chair, and took up a package of papers.

Louise, watching him intently, knew that he was not thinking of the contents of those papers, and she steadied herself to meet and answer the searching questions that she feared.

But in a moment he carefully replaced the papers on the table, and looking at her with his usual pleasant smile, said: "Very well, my dear; at what time to-morrow do you want to go?"

Startled by this unexpected acquiescence, she answered: "At half-past four to-morrow afternoon, Mr. Garder."

"Have you bought your ticket?"

"Yes, Mr. Garder"—she could not frame a lie while her old friend looked at her with those eyes so full of kindness.

"To Guanajuato, Mexico, isn't it, Louise?"

"Mr. Garder," said Louise, springing up from her chair, "did Mr. Stelwyn tell you?"

The old man lifted his hand quickly and said: "No, my dear; Jack hasn't told me anything, and I would prefer not to have you tell me anything; but you will not be offended, dear, if I tell you something, and if I do something that you had not expected. I will not interfere with any of your plans, but I will take care of you, little girl. I know you are longing to be with your father, dear. Jack could not take you there—but I can. You need not tell me anything. I will go with you to-morrow, and leave you with your father, in safety—and then I shall wait here until you need me again."

They were both standing now.

"Mr. Garder," said Louise, and her steady voice failed her for the moment. She turned toward the window.

She could endure her own suffering unflinchingly, but there was some subtle power in the loving kindness of this old man that affected her beyond her control. When she turned Mr. Garder stood beside her.

"Never mind, dear," he said. "Don't say anything about it. Wouldn't you like to come with me to the ticket office, and then we will go home?"

"Oh, Mr. Garder," she said, taking his hand, "I wish I could tell you everything."

"But, my dear, there is nothing to tell me now. I know all that is necessary. Jack will tell me the rest when he thinks proper. I would rather hear it from him. Now, shall we go, daughter?"

They went together to the ticket office and Mr. Garder returned the half-section that Louise had purchased and secured two opposite sections.

Then he took her home, and through all the evening he never once alluded to Stelwyn or to her father—but he traced out their journey—town by town—and told her of all that was strange or interesting on the route.

The next day, in the afternoon, when Sammy had called the carriage to take them to the train, Louise, who had been worrying all day about Jack's view of this unannounced part of the programme, said, hesitatingly: "Don't you think, Mr. Garder, we ought to leave some word?"

"Certainly, my dear," said the lawyer. "Sit down, please, and write a note to Jack and tell him—whatever you think best. Sammy will take it to him in the morning."

So Louise wrote hurriedly and nervously:

"**My DEAR MR. STELWYN:**

"I did not tell Mr. Garder anything—but he seems to know very much. He has insisted upon going with me, and will return when we have reached the end of our journey." She thought for a moment, and then quickly added: "Will you please write to me—if there is anything new?"

She sealed the letter and gave it to Sammy. "Please take it to Mr. Stelwyn in the morning, Sammy," she said.

"Yes, ma'am," replied the boy. "If he comes in before I get started, I can give it to him, can't I?"

"Of course you can, Sammy," said Mr. Garder, with a frown.

Stelwyn did come in at five o'clock on that afternoon. He had been lurking about the depot, hoping to get a farewell word with Louise, but he had not dared to go into the car to find her—and he had just missed seeing her drive up with Garder and enter the train.

He read Louise's note, and was speechless with astonishment. At length he said to himself: "That sly old dog has got ahead of me after all!"

But he was very glad to feel that Louise was in the care of the sly old dog.

"And now," Jack continued, "we must hustle this business that Slick reported last night."

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE GENTLEMAN WINS TWO GAMES

Stelwyn had left a card for Mr. Slick on the day of his return from Mexico—and at the usual midnight hour the detective was admitted to Jack's library.

"What news, Mr. Slick?" said Stelwyn.

"Of course you are aware that the man whom we are trying to clear has taken things into *his own* hands and has made his escape from the penitentiary?"

"So I have been informed," said Jack.

"I assume, Mr. Stelwyn, that while you know nothing of his present place of hiding, you may be able to find him when the success of our work may justify his reappearance?"

"You may assume anything you wish, Mr. Slick," said Jack, with a smile. "What progress have you made during the past week?"

"Did you know that our man, Thomas Sconer, was arrested night before last?"

"No," said Jack, eagerly. "What for? Have you carried matters so far, Mr. Slick, without my orders," he continued, angrily.

"I did not arrest him, nor cause his arrest, Mr. Stelwyn," said the detective. "He was soon released by the fools who arrested him. The city employs them, and they are alleged to be *detectives*." Mr. Slick uttered the word with a sneering emphasis, and again opened his lips and showed his teeth in his silent grin. "Mr. Stelwyn, you can scarcely credit it, but he was arrested as the escaped convict, John Morliss."

"How was that possible?" asked Jack.

"All things are possible to the officers employed by this city. You may or may not know, Mr. Stelwyn, that Ralph Sconer has been suspected of aiding Morliss in his escape. *It is said* that he sent a file or two into the cell, concealed in a book."

"Yes," said Jack, with another smile, "so I have heard."

"These idiots have been keeping tab on Ralph Sconer's movements, and watching the house in which he had rooms. Night before last I parted with Thomas Sconer at eleven o'clock, after we had both been quite successful at Tom's place. I went home and took off my disguise, and in my ordinary costume walked to the house in which Sconer lives. I felt sure that he would return to Tom's for a last whirl or two before going home—and I wanted to see from his manner whether he was still on top—for I am waiting for the luck to run against him. Well, I easily located two of the bull-headed idiots who were watching the house. I knew them both, and they knew me. As soon as I assured them that I had no lay in that quarter, they confided to me that they were on the watch for Morliss, and believed they should catch him at that house. I sympathized and waited with them. Presently, at about one o'clock, along comes Sconer with a quick walk and a nervous look about him—and mounts the steps.

"That's our man!" whispers one of these great discoverers—and they both spring up the steps. I loiter behind and watch.

"One of them grabs Sconer by the arm, and says in a tone that it would have done you good to hear, 'No use, John Morliss; the game's up. Come back with us easy.'

"Of course it was ludicrous. We all went into the house together and woke up Ralph Sconer, and I actually believe that if I hadn't assured them that I knew the man to be Sconer and not Morliss, they would have lugged him off in spite of the testimony of his son."

The detective paused to grin silently at the remembrance.

"It was funny, wasn't it," he said, "that those fools should have actually blundered on to the man that committed the burglary—when they were hunting the man that didn't do it?"

Jack laughed a little also. It did not altogether displease him that his clever trick upon Ralph should be the cause of some annoyance to Ralph. He had grown to look upon Ralph—who had known Louise for years before he himself ever heard of her—as a disagreeable intruder—to be suppressed.

"That is quite entertaining, Mr. Slick," he said; "but, in

the meantime, you haven't told me what you have accomplished."

"Mr. Stelwyn," answered the detective, resuming his usual sedate manner, "I have not *accomplished* anything; but I have paved the way to something that I hope will be quite satisfactory. During the last week I have been on the most intimate terms with Sconer. I have loaned him money to play with, and have played myself nightly in his company, and have gradually—from dark hints at first to definite proposals at the end—led him to understand that I want his help in an undertaking that will net us both a neat little sum. When I have had a number of drinks in an evening I have grown quite confidential, and he knows that his friend 'Billy Johnson' is badly wanted by the New York police, and is out here under an assumed name—taking a vacation for his health and with an eye to stray business. He recognizes the expert," continued Mr. Slick, with a smile of self-appreciation, "and he is nearly ready to join me in my little enterprise."

"Go on, Slick," said Jack, now deeply interested. "What's the enterprise?"

"Only this, Mr. Stelwyn. I propose to burglarize these rooms of yours and take away a large amount of jewelry and cash."

"The devil you do!" said Jack. "What does this mean, Slick?"

"I have told him," continued the detective, calmly and without heeding Jack's startled question, "that I have learned all about your affairs from different sources; that you have large interests in silver mines near Guanajuato, Mexico, and that you are down there at present; that during your absence these rooms are in charge of only an old negro servant, who does not sleep here; that I have called here twice, while you were away, once disguised as a book agent, and once as a friend of yours from the East. Both times I have conversed with your servant, and had a fair opportunity of studying the whole arrangement of the rooms. It would be the simplest thing in the world for a man or two men to go through the passage into the open court, pry up your kitchen window, and take every valuable that they could carry, without fear of disturbance. What do you think of my simple *little scheme*?"

The detective leaned back in his chair and looked at Stelwyn with a smile.

Jack's face was a study. He was trying to divine the other's drift—but he gave it up.

"Well, what then?" he said, at length.

"Then? I will explain to you in detail."

Mr. Slick thereupon described his plan—and Stelwyn listened with an intense interest that grew into eagerness, and when the detective stopped Jack said:

"By Jove! Slick; I like that. It smacks of excitement—and it should give us what we want."

"It is the one thing we need, Mr. Stelwyn. We have all the other evidence that can possibly be obtained. This will clinch it."

"I shall thoroughly enjoy that," said Jack, as he got up and began to pace the room. "Are you sure of your man, Slick? Can you work him up to the point?"

"The first night he has bad luck at the game, he will come."

"The sooner the better," said Jack. "I am deadly anxious to play my rôle."

"It won't do to have nerves, Mr. Stelwyn," said Slick, as he watched Jack marching up and down the room.

"No, no!" replied the young man, sitting down. "Never fear for my nerves. I am only in a hurry to be in at the death."

"It is liable to be any night after to-night. You had better tell your servant that if any stranger inquires for you through the day he is to say that you have not returned from Mexico—and keep yourself out of sight as much as possible. It is not likely that Sconer will inquire, but if he should learn that you are in the city it would postpone our undertaking. Remember to keep the rooms darkened through the evening. When your guests arrive it will be about two o'clock in the morning."

Mr. Slick departed, and before going to bed Jack examined the fastenings of all his windows, and then felt the pulse of his loaded revolver, and laid it under his pillow.

Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday passed without news, without event. Jack dismissed Colon every night at eight o'clock, and formed the habit of napping in his easy chair until the first streak of day sent him to bed.

Wednesday morning there came a telegram:

"Arrived safely, and met father. All well and happy.  
Write. Louise Random."

So Jack, very glad at the news and nothing loath to write to Louise, sat down and covered a page with congratulations and vague intimations of approaching success, and carefully weighed and considered expressions of his desire to be with her and her father once more.

In the afternoon Sammy appeared at the club and found Jack.

He handed him a sealed envelope and said: "Mr. Stelwyn, a feller that I didn't know, and wouldn't give no name, came to the office and said I was to be sure and find you, and you'd be glad to have this."

Jack opened the envelope and found a blank card on which was written—"Probably to-night."

"I am glad to have it, Sammy," he said, and Sammy was glad to have the dollar that Jack handed him.

Stelwyn dined with a friend and played billiards for two hours after dinner. At first he was preoccupied and played carelessly—but when the half dozen watchers who always congregated to see Jack Stelwyn play billiards began to make jeering comments in the true fraternal club spirit, Jack was recalled to himself and realized that to-night, if ever, he must have all his nerve. Thenceforward he played a phenomenal game. The audience gradually increased and became silent. They spoke only in whispers, as if afraid to disturb him, and when at the end of the greatest run ever made in the club, he lost on a miscue—there was a spontaneous shout of admiration from the crowd that had abandoned every table in the room and peered over each other's shoulders to watch the champion.

Jack was the coolest man among them all, and while a dozen hands slapped him on the back and as many more strove to shake his own hand, he smilingly made his way through the throng of admirers. To the chorus of expostulations he said: "I never could approach it again, boys. I'm not going to hurt my glory," and he made his escape and walked quickly to his rooms.

He was not above being proud of that extraordinary run, and his success seemed to stimulate him to the work that lay before him. "By Cæsar!" he said to himself, "my nerve is all right."

When Colon opened the door for him he had his whole campaign laid out.

He walked into the library, yawned and stretched, and looked at the clock. It was quarter after ten.

"I'm tired to-night, Cole," he said; "is everything right about the house?"

"Everyt'in' all right, Mar's Jack. Yoe gwine to bed now?"

"Yes; I'm sleepy, uncle. You skip for home, will you—and call me for ten o'clock breakfast."

"Yaas, Mas'r Jack; ten o'clock," and the old man started for the door.

Jack stood for a moment, thinking, and then he called the servant back again.

"Cole," he said, with a yawn, "you're a pretty good sort of a fellow after all." His fingers were feeling in his vest pocket and presently drew out some bills. "The little kids haven't had any fun for some time. Go and get them something for me, will you?" and he handed the old man a twenty-dollar bill. "There, never mind, you old beggar!" he continued, with seeming anger. "You needn't waste your thanks. I know you. Get out, will you, and let me go to bed."

When the old man had reached the end of the hall Jack sang out, pleasantly, "Good night, Old King Cole!" and Cole, thinking it best not to return, answered, "Mas'r Jack, good night, and Gawd bress yoe, Mas'r Jack," and the door was closed.

And Jack said to himself, "Well, if anything *should* go wrong with me to-night I believe that old nigger would be sorry."

So, after all, Jack was a little nervous—in his own way.

Being left alone Mr. Stelwyn prepared for action. He took off his shoes and went into the kitchen. He tested the electric switch near the door and satisfied himself that all was in perfect order. Then he carefully unfastened the kitchen window opening out on the court, and left it so that it could be easily raised.

He went back to his bedroom and got his revolver, and although he knew it was fully loaded, he turned back the barrel and inspected the cylinder and made sure that the action was easy. He slipped the weapon in the side pocket of his coat and said to himself, "I mustn't use it. I mustn't shoot unless I have to."

He looked about the library and continued, "A man's nerves are easier in an easy chair," and he lifted an arm-chair and carried it down to the rear end of the hall and placed it near the kitchen door, where he could have a view of the window and was within one step of the electric switch. The clock pointed to quarter after eleven. He lit a cigarette and sat down quietly in the library. "I shall have plenty of time to finish this," he said. He was trying to make himself feel as if he were waiting for an ordinary business engagement.

Before the cigarette was half finished he hurled it into the empty grate, got up and turned out all the lights and crept in his stocking feet to the chair by the kitchen door. He sat down and grasped the handle of his revolver with his right hand, and began to wait.

The beginning of such waiting is full of apprehension, the middle period is one of nervous anger and a longing for anything—the very worst—as a relief. Toward the end—if the waiting is long—the nerves undergo a reaction, a temporary exhaustion that leads to drowsiness.

Jack heard the clock strike twelve. He heard it strike one. He heard it strike one again, and he was dreamily trying to remember whether he had heard one or two strokes, when suddenly his faithful second consciousness, which, without his own volition, had been watching for *unusual* sounds, advised him of an approach. In an instant the whole man was normally awake, and every faculty was on the alert.

He could hear a dull, creaking sound at the window. He silently stood and held his revolver ready with his right hand, while his left hand touched the electric switch. He was conscious that his nerves were like steel. He even remembered the great run at billiards, and thought, "I could beat it now."

He heard the sash slowly rising and could faintly discern a shadowy figure.

Then he distinctly heard a whisper, "Climb in softly, Tom, and don't move till I show you the way."

Then the dim light of the window was obscured by a bulky form that swung itself through the opening and reached the inside with a slight creak of the flooring.

Stelwyn did not move a muscle. For the instant he did *not* breathe.

"Give me your hand," said the same voice, and another dark figure climbed and was pulled into the room. Silence for an instant, and then in the whisper, "Straight ahead. Softly"—a smothered oath followed by a *sneeze*—and at that signal Stelwyn's left hand turned the switch and Thomas Sconer, dazed by the sudden blaze of light, looked for one instant at the six-foot height of Stelwyn and the leveled revolver in his hand, then turned involuntarily and found another revolver close at his head, while a strong hand seized his arm and a voice hissed in his ear, "Hands up quick, or out go your brains!"

"Mr. Stelwyn," said Sconer's follower, in the usual placid tones of Mr. Slick, "will you kindly take charge of this toy, our friend might get hurt with it." He had extracted a revolver from Sconer's hip pocket and passed it over to Stelwyn.

Sconer, with his hands in the air, had looked from one to the other of his entrappers with the sullen ferocity of a wild beast in a cage.

"What the hell is this game, Bill?" he said at last.

"It's all in the cards, Sconer," said Mr. Slick, affably. "Mr. Stelwyn, may I trouble you to turn on the light in the library. Thank you. Now, my man, this gun has a hair trigger. Walk in, please. Take this chair, here by the table. Mr. Stelwyn, allow me to introduce Mr. Thomas Sconer. He has desired the pleasure of your acquaintance for some time and if I am not mistaken you will be glad to know him."

Mr. Slick, with an airy wave of his left hand, first to Sconer and then to Stelwyn—still with his eye on Sconer and his right hand on the revolver—drew up a chair and seated himself opposite to Sconer.

Stelwyn, as previously arranged, had said nothing up to this point. Here was his cue, and he felt that he had the nerve to play the game, or the rôle.

With a gentle suavity that even excelled that of the detective, he said, as he carelessly examined his revolver, "I have known of you for some time, Mr. Sconer. Let me assure you that I am glad to know you personally—under these circumstances."

Still looking with affectionate interest at his revolver, he leisurely seated himself in an easy chair near the table. He slowly raised his eyes and fixed them upon the sullen face of the man whom he had at last brought to bay. "Thomas

Sconer," he said with an intensity in his usual quiet, gentlemanly voice, "you have been caught in the act of burglary. Shall I step to the telephone and call the police patrol?"

The man shifted uneasily in his chair and glanced at his companion. Mr. Slick seemed to be looking at his revolver with one eye, but the other eye certainly met Sconer's glance.

"I was led into this," Sconer said huskily.

"Do you know, Sconer," continued Jack, with a slight increase of force in his voice, "that if I do call the police, you will be indicted by the grand jury on three separate counts: First, for this attempted burglary; second, for the burglary at Coldart & Goolie's on the night of February 14th"—Jack paused for an instant—as Sconer started and seemed to grow pale. "Third, for the little matter of your perjury in the trial of John Morliss in March. Do you know, Sconer," Jack's voice grew more intense and his eyes more fierce as he leaned forward toward his victim, "do you know that I have in my possession the most absolute, convincing proofs of the truth of John Morliss' story about the burglary? Do you know that I have the affidavits of the men who saw you in that alley and saw Morliss seize you? Do you know that I have the card that you stole from the pocket of your son with the numbers of the vault combination? Do you know that I can show that that card was found in your pocket? Do you know that I have a stenographic report of your conversation with a sailor at Tom's Place, when you paid him fifty dollars of your gambler's winnings to buy him off from reporting what he and his mate had seen?"

Sconer ground out an oath between his set teeth.

"Do you know," Jack continued savagely, "that the sailor was known to me and that close to that board partition in Tom's Place, a detective was making short-hand notes of all the conversation? Do you know and realize that an habitual gambler, a perjurer, a pickpocket, a burglar twice convicted—all of this I can prove against you—is sure of a twenty years' sentence?"

Jack stopped for a moment. He was out of breath, and wanted to study his next shot.

Sconer scowled across the table and said nothing.

Mr. Slick took up the conversation in his mildest tone. "Sconer," he said gently, "do you know that I've been your best friend ever since that burglary of yours at Coldart &

Goolie's? Don't you remember what fun you had with old Mr. Greenfield, and how you tried to get him drunk and pick his pocket? Do you happen to know who I am, Sconer? Don't you recognize the man that saved you from being taken to the station last week?"

Sconer looked with a sullen curiosity at the detective.

"Mr. Stelwyn," said the latter, "kindly keep your eye on our friend for a moment." He stepped into the hall and almost instantly returned with the well-known face of William Slick.

"Yes, I know ye—damn ye!" growled Sconer. He looked nervously from Slick to Stelwyn, and from Stelwyn to Slick, and at last his parched tongue and lips framed the question:

"What do you want of me, gentlemen?"

"You confess that you committed that burglary at Coldart & Goolie's, do you?" said Stelwyn.

Sconer looked about the room as if wondering whether a stenographer was concealed somewhere, then he said:

"I ain't confessin' nothin' at present."

Stelwyn laughed easily. "Mr. Slick," he said, "we waste time with this man. Please step to the telephone and call the patrol."

Sconer sat in dogged silence until he heard the bell ring, then he called quickly, "Wait a minute, Mr. Slick!"

The detective came slowly to the door and said sternly: "No fooling about this, Sconer! Did you commit the burglary at Coldart & Goolie's on February 14th; yes or no, and quick?"

"What do I get if I own up?" said Sconer, anxiously.

For answer Slick turned to the hall and rang the telephone bell once more.

"Yes," called Sconer, desperately. "I own up. I did the job at Coldart's. Morliss was all right. Please let me off this time, Mr. Slick. You've got me hard, but think of my boy Ralph. Don't disgrace me for his sake. He's a good boy."

The ruffian actually clasped his hands together and looked from Stelwyn to Slick in an agony of entreaty.

Jack got up and turned his back to him, and for the first time in his life spat into the empty fireplace.

"So!" said Slick, quietly. "We'll drop the wire for the moment. Mr. Stelwyn, we have this man's confession on

*record.*" Again Sconer looked about the room for the stenographer. "Perhaps you had better draw up a paper for him to sign—just as a side document."

While Jack sat down and wrote out the confession, Sconer was studying the situation with all the keenness of an experienced gambler. "They have some damned stenographer here," he reasoned. "It's all down against me already. They have all the cards, and if I don't sign this thing, they'll send me up. There's a soft spot in this Stelwyn. If I sign and beg, he may let me off. If I don't sign there's the devil in it. I'll sign."

"Sconer," said Jack in a few minutes, "I will read you the confession that I require you to sign. Please note it, Mr. Slick."

Jack read from the paper in his hand: "I, Thomas Sconer, employed as a porter by Coldart & Goolie, at 18 Spring Street, hereby confess and acknowledge that I obtained from my son Ralph Sconer, without his knowledge, a card having the combination numbers of the vault door in the office of said Coldart & Goolie. I further confess that on the evening of February 14th last I learned from John Morliss that a package of ten thousand dollars in greenbacks had been deposited in Coldart & Goolie's office vault on the afternoon of February 14th. I confess that I went to Coldart & Goolie's building, that I climbed the fire-escape ladder and pried open the office window; that I opened the vault by the combination; I took the package of ten thousand dollars and descended the fire-escape to the alley. I further confess that at the street I was seized by John Morliss, whom I fully recognized, and that said Morliss took from me the package of money before mentioned. I escaped from said Morliss and returned to my room. My son Ralph, to the best of my knowledge and belief, was not aware of the time that I reached my room.

"I further confess and acknowledge that the testimony which I gave at the trial of John Morliss was false in so far as it varies from the foregoing true statement.

"I make this confession in the presence of William Slick and John G. Stelwyn, and of my own free will, without influence of any threats or any promises from them or from either of them."

Jack had written this very hastily, and he looked at Slick as he finished the reading.

"It will do," said the detective, carelessly. "We don't really need it, you know. But—Sconer will sign it. It's all correct and true isn't it, Sconer?"

"What do I get if I sign," said Sconer, mindful of the imaginary stenographer.

"You get the telephone if you don't sign," replied Slick, promptly.

Sconer took the pen that Stelwyn handed him and signed his name to the confession, and Stelwyn and Slick signed their names as witnesses.

Then Sconer suddenly dropped his head in his hands and began to sob and blubber about his boy Ralph.

"Shall I call the patrol, Mr. Stelwyn?" said Slick. Stelwyn was walking nervously about the room.

"No, Slick," he said. "We have all we want. I can't hit a man when he's down. Sconer," he continued, facing the cringing scoundrel, "I'll give you twenty-four hours, after that Mr. Slick will be on your track."

"And let me remind you, Sconer," said Slick, gently, "that I shall find you if you're in this country."

"Thank you, gentlemen," said Sconer, humbly. "May I go now?" He stood up.

"Yes! Go! Get out of sight quick!" said Jack, and Slick escorted Sconer to the front door, and with a parting admonition to "make tracks and thank his luck," he closed the door behind him.

"Great work, Slick!" said Stelwyn, as the detective returned to the library. "The case is complete. To-morrow I go to Mexico and get a full statement from Mr. Morliss."

"Yes?" said the detective, slightly raising his eyebrows, "I did not know that Mr. Morliss was in Mexico."

"Oh, damn it! Yes, you did know it, Slick. What's the use of lying? We're all right, my boy. The wind is with us," and Jack slapped the detective on the back, and then brought out a decanter and a couple of glasses.

"Thanks, Mr. Stelwyn," said Slick; "you know my rule—never except for business purposes."

"Well, here's to your future business, Slick," said Stelwyn, as he emptied the glass.

"Mr. Stelwyn," said the detective, gravely, "look out for that man. I know him. He is a dangerous customer. He would never dare to touch me, but—he has it in for you."

"Rats!" said Jack, derisively. "Don't you believe in my nerve yet, Slick?"

"You have done magnificently to-night, Mr. Stelwyn," said the detective, as he left the house. "But—take my advice and be wary of Thomas Sconer."

## CHAPTER XXV

### THE GENTLEMAN ENCOUNTERS A STURDY OPPONENT

On the day before the entrapment of Thomas Sconer, his son Ralph had called at Mr. Garder's office to see Louise. He knew that she was living at Mr. Garder's house, but he had stifled his feeling at the affront put upon him by the lawyer, and was anxious to see Louise and apologize to her for his thoughtlessness at his visit to the house. With his strong, natural love of justice, he had realized that he deserved the treatment which Garder had given him, and he sincerely desired to put himself right before them both. Ralph knew that he was not often in the wrong, and when his own quiet reflection convinced him of a mistake or an injustice on his part, he was sternly willing to condemn himself to the measure of his opinion of his error.

He found only Sammy, occupying the large arm-chair in the private office, with a book in his hand.

Ralph recognized the smart boy who had insulted him at the house, and his look and manner at once intensified Sammy's ready combativeness.

"Where is Miss Morliss, boy?" asked Ralph.

Sammy surveyed Ralph with a trick of the eyes that he had learned from Mr. Garder, then he said, indifferently: "I dunno nothin' about Miss Morliss."

"Hasn't she been to the office to-day?" asked Ralph.

"Nope," said the boy. He slowly turned a page with a wonderful affectation of being disturbed in his reading.

"When does she usually come down?" asked Ralph.

"She don't come down any more," said Sammy. Ralph came around the table angrily, and Sammy slid out of his chair and stood ready to dodge.

"Do you mean that she is sick?" said Ralph, with more of impatience than anxiety.

The boy noticed his increasing annoyance, and his eyes

sparkled as he answered, slowly: "She may be very sick, for all I know. She looked pretty bad when I seen her last."

"When was that?" said Ralph.

"Let's see," said Sammy; "that must have been about a week ago."

"Is she at Mr. Garder's house?"

"No, she ain't there."

"Has she gone back to her own home?" asked Ralph, eagerly. He would have been glad to know that she had decided to leave this new protector.

"No," said Sammy; "I don't believe she has. You might go and inquire. I think she's gone out of town somewhere. I hain't seen anything of her since she told Mr. Garder she was goin' to leave him."

"When will Mr. Garder come in?"

Sammy looked gravely at the office clock, which marked quarter before twelve, and said, after some reflection:

"Well, he might be in at nine o'clock in the morning, three days from now, or he might be detained another day."

"Damn it, boy!" said Ralph, fiercely; "do you know where Mr. Garder is?"

Sammy instinctively drew to the other side of the table as he said:

"Don't swear, Mr. Sconer; you won't catch no fish. Mr. Garder's down East somewhere on business."

"Does he know where Miss Morliss is?"

"Not's I know of. I hain't heard him say anythin' about her since she left."

With a muttered imprecation, Ralph darted out of the office and slammed the door behind him, whereupon Sammy, after assuring himself that the inquirer was safely away, executed an Indian war dance and shook both fists in the air and whooped and laughed, and then betook himself, chuckling, to "The Adventures of Daring Dick."

Ralph hurried to the cottage on Norden Street, and after vainly trying to awake a response to his repeated ringing of the bell, he went across the street and called on Mrs. Morton. That good-hearted lady was glad to see him, and urged him to stay to lunch, but she had not seen Louise since the day of the funeral.

"She is living at Mr. Garder's house now, Ralph," she said. "Wasn't it kind in him to take charge of the poor girl?"

Haven't you called on her there? Why, Ralph, I'm ashamed of you."

And poor Ralph, who had only stayed away because he had to get things properly adjusted in his own mind after his snubbing, waited to hear no more, but went straight to Garder's house.

The old housekeeper answered the door herself. She had been instructed by Mr. Garder.

"I really don't know where Miss Morliss is," she said. "A week ago she decided to leave us, and of course we could not detain her, much as we all wanted to. Mr. Garder was very sad about it." (This last was not in the old lady's instructions.)

"Where is Mr. Garder?" asked Ralph, frantically.

"Well, I don't rightly know where he is now," said the housekeeper. "He was called away some days ago on business down East, and he may be back in a few days more. He always lets me know a day beforehand, so I don't expect him until after to-morrow, anyway."

Ralph went away perplexed and distressed. "She has gone to her father, somewhere," he thought, "but she would not trust me enough to tell me of it. Strange girl! And she knows that I am anxious to help her in any way. Well, patience wins in the end. She will realize it all by and by," and an hour later Mr. Ralph Sconer was deep in his business, forgetting that he had had no lunch, and only casually remembering that the girl whom he proposed to make his wife had mysteriously vanished beyond his ken.

On the morning after the adventure at Stelwyn's rooms, Thomas Sconer appeared at breakfast at the usual hour with his son. He had been almost without sleep, but in his waking hours he had elaborated a plan of revenge, and of possible security. As they sat down at the table he began his work.

"Ralph," he said, "I know you were once pretty sweet on that girl of Morliss'—what's her name? Louise—that's it."

"Well?" said Ralph. He swiftly wondered what was coming, but controlled his eagerness.

"Do you know where she is?"

"Yes, I do," said Ralph, ashamed to own that he did not know. But the old poker-player read the hand in the face.

"Well, Ralph," he said, "if you're satisfied, I am. I saw her last night."

"Where did you see her?" said Ralph, quickly.

"Oh, never mind, boy. She's all right—she's looked out for."

"What do you mean, father? Be careful what you say. You are mistaken."

"Nary mistake, Ralph. I know her well enough. I brushed against her right under a lamp-post. I guess she knew me, too, for she turned her head away quick; but I knew her, and I seen where she went."

"What time was this?" said Ralph, nervously.

"Along about twelve o'clock last night," said the senior.

"That's a lie!" said Ralph. "It's impossible. You are either lying to me, or else you have made a mistake."

"All right, boy," said his father, carelessly, sipping his coffee. "I don't care what *you* call it. I'm only telling you what I saw. You may think I'm lyin', but I know I ain't."

"Where did you see her, and where did she go?" said Ralph.

The man stopped in the act of setting down his coffee cup, and, holding it in his hand, said: "I've got nothin' more to say. You think I'm a liar. You get nothin' more out'n me. If you want any information, go ask someone you can believe."

"But, father," said Ralph, "I didn't mean to call you a liar, and I do want to know about Louise. I think you were mistaken—but tell me, what you did see."

"You get nothin' more from me, after what you said, but I could tell you something that would make your darned head swim, if you care anythin' about that gal. I hain't made no mistake."

Ralph continued to urge, and his father continued to egg him on by refusals and dark suggestions of what he might tell. Finally, when Ralph was at the boiling point of anxiety and eagerness, his father said:

"Ralph, you seem to be dead set on knowin' this. I was goin' to tell you all about it if you hadn't insulted me. Now, if you want to know, why, you've got to pay for it. I want some money to-day. There's twenty-five comin' to me in a few days. Just let me have a hundred, and you can keep out the twenty-five, and I'll agree to tell you somethin' that's true. Maybe you'll think it astonishin', but I didn't. It'll be easy worth the hundred if you care for the gal, because

it'll be likely to save you a good many hundreds, to say nothin' of your self-respect."

Ralph was enraged and perplexed, but he must know what was to be told. He realized from his father's attitude and manner that he would never know unless he paid.

"Come upstairs," he said, abruptly, and Thomas Sconer followed his son, with a leer on his face. He knew himself the winner.

Ralph drew out his pocket-book and passed over five twenty-dollar bills to his father.

"Now tell me what you know," he said, fiercely.

Thomas Sconer folded the bills and put them in his pocket.

"I don't think you'll like to hear it, Ralph," he said.

"Go on," said Ralph.

"Do you happen to know of an all-round sport in this town, called Stelwyn?"

"Yes," said Ralph; "what of him?"

"Well, then, probably you know that he's one of the most fascinatin' chaps that we have with us. Perhaps you don't know that he's been after your gal Louise for a few months—workin' in with her by talkin' about old Morliss, and stirrin' up her sympathy."

"Go on," said Ralph.

"But I'll bet you don't know that at twelve o'clock last night I seen Louise Morliss go into Stelwyn's private bachelor rooms. Do you, now, Ralph?"

Ralph looked at the man for an instant, his face dark with anger. "I suppose you are still my father," he said, "but you are a liar and a scoundrel, and so is anyone who says that of Louise Morliss."

"So, so, sonny! that touches you, does it?" said the father. "Well, you wanted to know it. I didn't promise to please you with what I saw. It's the truth, though. If you feel bad about it, go and stir up that gay bird Stelwyn. He can tell you more than I know."

The old scoundrel shrugged his shoulders and left the house.

Ralph sat for some time thinking. He did not for an instant believe anything to the discredit of Louise, but he reflected on possibilities. He believed her to be somewhere in hiding with her father. Was it not possible that her father was in Stelwyn's rooms? He had no reason to sup-

pose that Stelwyn had ever interested himself in Mr. Morliss. He had seen him once in Mr. Garder's office, that was all. Then he recalled the strange fact that the lawyer had employed Louise—a girl unknown to him, and without experience—at a salary of seventy-five dollars. He remembered the, to him, remarkable interest which Mr. Garder had taken in Louise after the death of her mother. He began to see a glimmer of light. Garder and Stelwyn were probably both interested in the escape of Morliss, and Morliss was undoubtedly hidden in Stelwyn's rooms. What safer place could have been found?

Ralph went to his office, still thinking, and at eleven o'clock he put on his hat and deliberately walked to Mr. Stelwyn's apartments and rang the bell.

In the meantime Thomas Sconer had also done some thinking, and the result of it was that when he was sure that Ralph had left the house he returned to it, packed an old gripsack with clothing and other necessaries, and went to Tom's place. He spent the day with varying luck, but at four o'clock he had won about seventy-five dollars. He went to the station, purchased a ticket, and boarded the train. He smiled an ugly smile as the train pulled out of the city. "Let them have their laugh now," he said, "they can't down me that easy."

Old Colon opened the door for Ralph.

"I wish to see Mr. Stelwyn," said the latter.

"What name, sir?" asked the servant.

"Please tell him that Mr. Ralph Sconer would like to speak with him on a matter of importance."

Colon reported to Jack, who had just finished his breakfast.

"Can that old scoundrel have told his son?" said Jack to himself. "Ask Mr. Sconer to walk into the library, Cole."

"Mr. Ralph Sconer?" said Stelwyn, inquiringly.

"Yes, sir; you are Mr. Stelwyn, I believe?"

"The same, sir. Will you be seated, Mr. Sconer?"

"Thank you; it is unnecessary," said Ralph, coldly.

"As you please, sir," said Jack, carelessly. "You will excuse me if I do not follow your choice," and he sat down in an easy chair with his face to his visitor and waited to hear what would be said.

"Mr. Stelwyn," said Ralph, "I am informed that you know of the whereabouts of Miss Louise Morliss, who disappeared from her residence and her office about a week ago."

"Indeed?" said Jack, with a slight frown. "And, assuming that your information is correct, may I ask what it has to do with your visit upon me?"

"Mr. Stelwyn, I have the honor to be one of Miss Morliss' oldest and best friends. Her reputation and her safety are very dear to me. I shall use every means in my power to protect them."

"Again, may I ask, why you intrust me with these extraordinary facts, if facts they are?" added Jack, with a polite sneer.

"Because I wish to learn from you the address of Miss Morliss, so that I may be able to assist her in certain matters of which I have knowledge."

"Has it occurred to you, sir, that if Miss Morliss were in need of your valuable assistance, she would probably call upon you?"

Ralph winced a little. "It is probable, Mr. Stelwyn," he said, "that she is not aware of the matters to which I refer."

"Again assuming that I know where Miss Morliss is at present," said Jack, "do you think that I would give *anyone* that information without her permission?"

"That could probably be obtained with but slight trouble on your part. Mr. Stelwyn, I am probably aware of much more than you suspect. I am aware of the manner of escape of Miss Morliss' father, and of those who probably assisted him. I had been a true friend to him, and even after he betrayed my confidence and committed the crime for which he was punished, I did the utmost possible to secure his acquittal. He would perhaps have been wiser to trust his old friend in his foolhardy escape."

"It seems to me, sir," said Jack, "that an old friend such as you claim to be would have believed his friend incapable of such a crime. I lay no claim to old friendship, or, indeed, to any friendship, from Mr. Morliss, and yet I assert that he did not and could not commit the crime."

"And yet you were one of those who convicted him," said Ralph, coldly.

It was Stelwyn's turn to wince. "I have undone that great error to the best of any man's ability," he said, slowly.

"John Morliss committed the burglary," said Ralph, "but I would have condoned it and spared him for his daughter's sake. It is of her that I wish to speak. I know that she is with him."

Jack was growing angry. "I assure you, sir," he said, "that John Morliss did not commit the burglary, for I have in my possession complete proofs against another man who did commit it."

"Indeed," said Ralph, with a sneer. "Perhaps you will be willing to part with that information, as it cannot affect Miss Morliss?"

"I am willing to part with it," said Stelwyn, haughtily, "since you desire it. The whole city will have it in a few days. The man who committed that burglary is the man whom Morliss truthfully denounced at the trial. If I mistake not, he is your father."

Ralph grew pale with anger, but, controlling himself with an effort, he said: "This is an uncalled for insult, Mr. Stelwyn. You would perhaps not utter it except in your own house."

For an instant Jack's eyes blazed; then he answered, quietly: "I have no wish to insult you, sir. If you will be seated I will prove the truth of my words by putting you in possession of all the facts which I have secured."

With a strange feeling of dread, Ralph took the chair which Stelwyn offered him, and waited while the latter went to his office and returned with a bundle of papers.

"Mr. Sconer," said Jack, as he seated himself near the table, "you have asked for these proofs yourself. It is not with any desire to insult you or to cause you suffering that I present them to you."

"Go on, sir," said Ralph.

"I have here," said Stelwyn, "the sworn statement of a man who spent several evenings with your father. You will pardon me if I withhold his name only for the present. He is a detective, and would prefer not to appear, except in court." Stelwyn then read the account of Slick's adventures when disguised as Hiram Greenfield, and how Sconer tried to pick his pocket. As he drew near the end Stelwyn paused, and, taking a card from the package, he handed it to Ralph. "Those figures are yours, Mr. Sconer, are they not?" he said.

"They appear to be," said Ralph, nervously, as he returned the card.

"Do you recall what those numbers mean?" said Jack, reading them slowly.

Ralph grew paler. "Yes," he said, hoarsely. "Where was that card found?"

"This affidavit states that it was found in the inside pocket of a vest worn by Thomas Sconer."

Ralph sat motionless. "Go on, please," he said.

"The next statement is from the manager of the vault door company, asserting that these numbers correspond with his record of the combination numbers of the vault door at Coldart & Goolie's."

"Undoubtedly," said Ralph. "Go on."

Then Jack read the affidavits of Slick and the stenographer at Tom's Place.

"Is there anything more?" asked Ralph. He had been wondering, Why was his father still at liberty? He was in a hurry to leave and warn him.

"Yes, there is more, Mr. Sconer," said Jack, gravely. "Your father was here last night. May I ask if it was he that led you to suppose that I knew of Miss Morliss?"

"It was," said Ralph, bitterly.

"He had reason to suppose that I was interested in this matter. I will detain you but a moment longer," and then Jack slowly read the confession to the end, and Ralph sat silently gazing at the floor.

"You will recognize this signature," said Stelwyn, and he took the paper in his hand and went to Ralph's chair and held out the signature for him to look at. Ralph raised his head and glanced at the paper, then bowed his acquiescence.

"Mr. Stelwyn," he said, slowly, "may I ask you why my— why Thomas Sconer was here last night?"

"He was attempting to burglarize these rooms."

"And was not arrested?"

"No, sir."

"Mr. Stelwyn," said Ralph, rising, "I am sorry to have annoyed you by this intrusion. Good afternoon, sir," and with a face that would hardly have been recognized by his friends he walked toward the door.

"Mr. Sconer," said Jack, "you will probably not find your father."

"Why not, sir?" said Ralph.

"He has undoubtedly left the city before this."

"Perhaps not," said Ralph, and with another bow he left the house.

He walked straight to Coldart & Goolie's and inquired for his father. Finding that Sconer had not been seen, he went quickly to his room. The things scattered about the room and the absence of the grip-sack indicated a hasty packing and flight.

"Better so," said Ralph. "I might forget myself."

With a strange feeling of not being himself, he went to his office and plunged into work.

Jack Stelwyn packed his grip-sack, and, carefully putting all his papers in a large envelope and into his breast pocket, he told Colon to look after the rooms until his return in a week.

"If anyone asks where I have gone, Cole, you don't know," he said.

"Yaas, Mas'r Jack," replied the servant. Then Stelwyn called his coupé and was driven to the club. He dispatched a telegram to Louise: "Everything completed. Shall leave on early morning train."

He took a room at the club, and was driven thence to the Mexican train at four o'clock in the morning.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### A REUNION IN MEXICO

On Saturday morning Thomas Sconer stepped from the train at Guanajuato. He had carefully studied the situation and from his knowledge of Stelwyn's interest in Morliss and his daughter, he was fully convinced that they were both at the village where Stelwyn's mines were located. Such being the case, he knew that Stelwyn would soon follow them.

After securing a room at a small American tavern, he left his grip-sack and made inquiries at the principal hotels. He soon learned the name of the village and the nearest route. It was about three miles distant up the mountains. He purchased a Mexican costume—sombrero and jacket and all complete—returned to his room and donned his new disguise.

He set out and walked briskly up the mountain road to the village, arriving there about noon.

He easily learned that Mr. Stelwyn was away at present, but that his cottage was occupied by some friends of his from the north. The cottage was pointed out, partly hidden in a clump of foliage half a mile above the village. Mr. Sconer made a slow and observant journey up the narrow winding path to within a hundred yards of the cottage, then, apparently satisfied, he returned to the village and found a place where he could buy some cheap Mexican food, which he washed down with a half-dozen glasses of Mescal.

Sauntering idly about the village he became interested in a cock fight that was going on in a small enclosure near the plaza. The courteous Mexicans opened their ranks to allow the stranger a good view, and began at once by gesticulations, showing money and pointing to the birds, with vociferous explanations in Spanish and an occasional word of English, to induce the newcomer to bet. Sconer finally pointed out *one of the birds* and put up a dollar.

The fight was long and fiercely contested, but in the end Sconer's judgment was sustained. His bird crowed loudly over the bleeding corpse of its antagonist. In the midst of more clamor and gesticulation Sconer received five Mexican dollars. Two more birds were produced and he was about to stake more money when, as he looked up, he suddenly saw the slight figure of a young lady in white dress and wide straw hat crossing the plaza. The figure seemed familiar to him, and with bows and smiling apologies to his companions he broke away from the throng and walked cautiously after the girl until near enough to recognize Louise Morliss. Then he turned to one side, crossed the plaza diagonally and, pausing under a tree, waited to see where she would go. It was about half past four.

Louise walked to the beginning of the road that led down to Guanajuato and she also stopped under a tree and stood looking down the road.

By cautious approaches Sconer drew nearer. She was evidently expecting some one. He must see who it was.

In about fifteen minutes the rattle of hoofs was heard, and a mule team and an open wagon appeared. He saw Louise spring forward and then he saw Stelwyn dismount and shake hands with her. He saw Stelwyn pay the driver, and the latter wheeled his team about and with loud cracks of the whip disappeared down the road.

He saw Stelwyn offer his arm to Louise, and the two set off at a brisk gait toward the path that led to the cottage.

Sconer turned and walked slowly back to the place where he had bought his lunch. He drank six more glasses of Mescal, and then with an evil smile on his face he proceeded leisurely up the trail toward the cottage.

Jack was surprised and delighted to see Louise waiting for him. His impatience had burned more fiercely than the furnace fires that burned up the long miles of his journey. He was elated—joyous—brimful of happiness. His great work was practically accomplished. Only a little legal formality and he could give back her father to the girl he loved.

"Louise," he said as he clasped her hand, "fellow-conspirator, we are victorious. I have Sconer's signed confession of the burglary."

It was the first time he had ever addressed her by her first name.

The fresh color came to her face, but she was not angry.

"Is it really, really true?" she said, eagerly. "At last, father is free again. Come, let us hurry to tell him," and as they walked briskly across the plaza Jack related the story of the burglary at his rooms, and how the confession had been frightened out of Sconer.

"Where did he go, then?" asked Louise.

"I'm sure I haven't the faintest idea," said Jack, "and I'm equally sure that I don't care where he went; do you?"

"No, indeed!" said the girl—"except—Mr. Stelwyn, aren't you afraid he will try to revenge himself some way? I hope he has gone far out of town."

"Trust him for that. He is an arrant coward, with all his villainy. I should feel ashamed to think of fearing him—but, Miss Morliss—Louise—you were just now kind enough not to be offended when I called you Louise—won't you be still kinder and return the compliment?"

"Would you think it a compliment if I called you—Jack?" she asked, with a little smile and blush.

"One of the greatest of compliments," said Jack.

"Then I'll try and remember it."

They walked on in silence for a little time. They had passed up the straggling village streets with their low adobe houses and entered the steep narrow trail that led diagonally up the mountain side to the cottage. The first part of the path was under the deep shade of semi-tropical trees, and the growth of underbrush on either side seemed impenetrable.

Presently Louise said, "Mr. Stelwyn."

"Don't know him," he replied, quickly.

"Oh, excuse me—well, Jack!"

"Thank you; that sounds much more friendly."

"Jack, does Ralph Sconer know of this?"

"Yes," said Stelwyn, and he told her that Ralph had called at his rooms, with some anxieties in the matter, and to set it right once for all he had told him the whole story and shown him his father's confession.

"Poor Ralph!" said the girl, with sincere sympathy. "I am so sorry for him. It must have been a terrible shock to his pride as well as to his feelings. How did he act?"

"Well!" said Jack, somewhat carelessly. "He appeared to be surprised—a little dazed in fact. But I think, Louise, that he never could feel anything very deeply. It isn't in his make-up."

"Do you think so?" said Louise, thoughtfully. "I hope so, for his sake."

The path emerged from the thicket and widened into a little open platform. To the right rose the steep rocky side of the mountain. To the left and below them a partial rift was formed by two jutting spurs extending down into the village. The head of this ravine was against the face of the mountain below the platform on which they stood, and from the edge of the platform was a nearly perpendicular fall of a hundred feet or more down to the rocks below.

"Isn't it a beautiful picture?" said Jack, as he paused for a moment and looked down into the quaint picturesque little village at their feet.

"Oh, it is wonderful," said the girl, enthusiastically. "Everything here is wonderful and beautiful. It is the loveliest spot in the world. Come," she suddenly continued, "we are forgetting father."

She hurried Jack along the trail into the shade again for a few rods, and then the vista opened once more and they saw the cottage and Mr. Morliss standing near the great tree that shaded the porch.

Louise dropped Jack's arm and ran to her father.

"Free! Free!" she cried. "You are free and safe, father dear," and in a moment her arms were about the old man's neck, and Jack turned and looked at the beautiful landscape.

Presently they came together behind him, and Morliss seized Jack's hand and pressed it with a grip that made him wince. "Mr. Stelwyn," he said in a voice that trembled slightly, "you have done for me the most that one man can ever do for another. You have restored to me freedom, honor, and, indeed, life, when they all seemed utterly lost. I will not try to thank you—but I love you, and I honor you above all men."

"I am as glad as you are, Mr. Morliss," said Jack; "I have lifted a great load from my own mind or—conscience—if I have one; but I could never have lifted your load nor my own either without the help of your daughter."

Louise laughed gaily. "How dreadfully elaborate we are with our compliments, Mr. Stelwyn. We are all free and safe and happy together—and one of us is hungry. Come father, come—Jack—the frijoles and the tortillas and all the other queer things will get cold."

She slipped one hand under her father's arm and the other under Stelwyn's arm and marched them both into the cottage.

Jack's little mountain house was far from being uncomfortable. It had been built under his own direction—entirely of logs dragged up from the timber country below, and was covered with vines.

From the wide veranda that extended across the front of the cottage the door opened into a large room with light and air from three sides. This was the reception-room, living-room and dining-room. A fine, airy bedroom, and two small bedrooms were in the rear. The kitchen was a separate building some fifty feet behind the house, farther up the mountain; and entirely hidden by the thick growth of bushes that extended for half a mile beyond the cottage and then gradually dwindled to scattering shrubs and solitary cacti and bare rocks.

Old Dolores, the Mexican housekeeper, had supper ready, and as they sat at the table Jack told Mr. Morliss how the enemy who had lied him into disgrace and imprisonment had been entrapped and forced to confess. The old man's eyes sparkled with satisfaction.

"After all, Louise, dear," he said, "justice comes at last. I was wrong to lose hope."

"But, don't forget, father, that Justice never moves unless somebody shakes her up."

"I shall never forget that, dear. The blind old dame would still be asleep if Mr. Stelwyn had not aroused her."

"Everything is complete, Mr. Morliss," said Jack; "but as a paper to go with these proofs and to be verified by them, I want a written statement from you, of all that happened after you left home on that night of February 14th. That is what I came here for to-day. With that in hand I leave here to-night, and in a few days all the legal formalities will be completed."

It goes without saying that Jack knew and Louise knew that he could have written for that statement just as well as to have made the long journey in person, but somehow neither thought it unnatural. And Mr. Morliss, not accustomed to a keen analysis of motives, took it as a matter of course.

But Louise was startled at a part of Jack's remark.

"Mr.—Jack, you are surely not going away to-night? Why, you have only just come," she said, quickly.

Stelwyn smiled a little gratified smile in spite of himself, as he said: "Yes; I can't rest until this is finished. I must get it all into Garder's hands, and then stay and punch the old man until he completes his part. I left my grip at Guanajuato and am going back there to-night, so as to take the early morning train."

"One day wouldn't make so much difference," said Louise, "and to-morrow is Sunday—you couldn't do anything to-morrow."

"Oh, yes, I can," said Jack, with a laugh. "I can accomplish five hundred miles of railroad, and be one day nearer the goal."

Louise was disappointed in spite of all her longing to complete the work for her father—and as she could not help showing it a little, Jack was very happy as they rose from the table.

They all went out to the veranda, while Dolores cleared the table.

It was already dark, but the summit of the opposite mountain ridge beyond Guanajuato was glowing with the soft light of the approaching moon. Far below them the scattered lights of the village twinkled through the night. The soft wind that crept up from the valley was sweet with the perfume of orange blossoms, and bore fitfully to their ears the tinkle of distant guitars.

Mr. Morliss went into the house and sat down to write out his statement, and Jack insisted that Louise should occupy the hammock. He drew a chair near her and lighted a cigarette.

They talked of all that had happened in the little time since they had known each other, of the strange chance that made Stelwyn a jurymen at that trial.

"If any other one of all those men had been chosen in your place," said Louise, "poor father would still be in prison, and there would be no hope."

As they talked the full moon slowly rose above the distant range and flooded the valley with its soft light.

Jack's hand, extended to swing the hammock, encountered the hand of Louise. It rested there lightly for an instant, and then the girl's hand was quietly withdrawn. Neither spoke for some minutes.

Stelwyn's love had never been stronger than then. The

sense of close companionship in that remote mountain cottage, the exquisite beauty of the tropical night, the sweet intoxicating perfumes of the soft breeze—it was altogether almost too much for his will-power.

Jack was by no means a vain man, but he was not a fool. He knew that Louise knew that he loved her—and he could not fail to see that she was at least not indifferent to him. And yet he controlled himself and spoke no word of love. He had registered a solemn vow that until he had fully and completely restored her father to freedom and honor among men, he would not declare his feeling to her.

Perhaps Louise understood him better than he thought. He had not contemplated the possibility that his courteous respect and his manly self-control would make her admire and love him the more.

"Mr. Stelwyn," called Mr. Morliss, "will you kindly read what I have written?"

Jack helped Louise from the hammock, and together they went into the house.

"It is just what we need, Mr. Morliss," said Jack, as he finished the reading. "The proofs that I have verify every word of your statement."

He folded the paper and put it in the large envelope with the others, and replaced the bulky package in the breast-pocket of his coat.

"Now," he said, with an affectation of gayety, "the books are finished. The scroll of justice is complete." He took out the package once more. "There's lots of good stuff in that envelope, Mr. Morliss," he said.

"There is a man's life in it, Mr. Stelwyn," replied the old man, earnestly.

Jack replaced the package and shook hands with Morliss.

"I must be away," he said. "Good-by until I come again. In a week or two I shall come with flying colors to take you both back with me."

"Good-by, Mr. Stelwyn; God bless and keep you."

Louise went out to the veranda with him.

"Are you not afraid to go down that lonely path at night?" she asked, with a little tremor in her voice.

"Afraid? No, indeed!" said Jack. "Every man in the village knows me, and I haven't an enemy among them all."

He took her hand and held it. She made a slight effort to withdraw it, but he placed his other hand over it.

"Good-by, Louise—little conspirator," he said. "When I come again will you remember what to call me?"

"I can remember a little while, Jack," she said. "Will you write to me?"

"Of course I will. You shall grow weary of my letters."

"Don't be afraid to try my endurance, please." She gently disengaged her hand.

Jack came very near kissing her—but he did not.

"Good-by," he said, and strode quickly down the path.

At the edge of the woods he turned in the moonlight and waved his hand. "Au revoir, Louise," he called.

"Hurry back again, Jack," she answered, and he disappeared in the shadow.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### THE GENTLEMAN SHEDS BLOOD FOR THE CAUSE

Jack walked quickly down the shaded path whistling softly to himself as he went. Stray moonbeams here and there piercing the thick foliage and swaying with the gentle sway of the branches, lighted the familiar route. He was happier than he had ever been. Never in his life before had he been really in love—and those beautiful eyes that he had looked into so searchingly but a moment before had been lighted with the love-light that he had longed to see in them. He had not mistaken it. He could not mistake it—for he had felt it. Henceforward whatever might happen—whatever even Louise herself might say—he *knew* that she loved him.

A week—perhaps two weeks—to be worked through, and then—

A turn in the path opened a vista upon the moonlit platform at the head of the ravine.

He hurried forward, without a thought of danger—and as he stepped into the lighted space—suddenly—instantly—a man had seized his right arm. In the same instant as he reeled backward something gleamed swiftly in the moonlight and he felt a blow and a touch as of ice on his chest. He gasped and staggered, and strove blindly to strike with his left hand. Again, like lightning, that swift thrust was repeated—and again he knew that it had pierced him.

All in one moment—and in the next with his left hand he had seized the right wrist of his assailant as the knife was raised for a third stroke. He was vaguely conscious of a blow in the face, and then he had gripped the other wrist with his right hand. He was awake now, fighting for life, fully aware of his situation—and with the strength of an athlete and the frenzy of rage he gripped those wrists and struggled to overthrow his assailant. The man's sombrero came off, and as the moonlight fell upon his face Jack recog-

nized Thomas Sconer. The sight caused a fierce spasm of rage and strength. "Ah!" he gasped, "Not yet!" and with a quick trip and a tremendous outward thrust he released the wrists that he had been holding and hurled the man from him. There was a hoarse cry and Thomas Sconer went headlong over the edge of the platform and down to the rocks below, and Jack sank upon the ground and pressed his hand to his left side.

He was dizzy, bewildered, gasping for breath, but he strove to steady himself. "He is dead," he whispered. "He struck me—twice—wasn't it? I think—I'm wounded—faint. The papers—I *must* get back."

He stood upon his feet and swayed for a moment, looking for the path, then, with long, swinging strides, still pressing his hand tightly to his left side, he hurried up the path to the cottage.

Instinct rather than sight guided him on that return journey. A thousand vague thoughts rushed through his mind; but strong above all and never lost was the mastering thought that he must reach the cottage with those papers.

It seemed as if he could not breathe. Something continually choked him—but he swung up to the cottage and in through the open door.

Louise and her father were sitting together on the rattan couch at one end of the room. They both started to their feet, as Jack rapidly approached them.

Without waiting he said, in a voice that sounded strangely thick and muffled:

"Wire for Garder at once. Give him the papers. I have been stabbed by Thomas Sconer. I have killed him. I—" a great gush of blood poured from his lips. With his left hand still pressed to his side he extended his right arm gropingly, and reeled toward the couch.

With a quick cry Louise sprang to him and her arms were about him and steadied and guided him as he fell upon the couch.

The old man was at her side.

"The curse is still upon me," he groaned.

As she wiped the blood from his mouth Louise screamed loudly for Dolores, and the old woman came running quickly, gave one glance at the insensible form on the couch and with a muttered invocation to the Virgin rushed from the room.

and reappeared with a pail of cold water and a handful of towels.

Pushing Louise quietly to one side and whispering rapidly to herself in her Mexican-Spanish, she threw some of the water in Jack's face and, wetting one of the towels, she wiped his face and his mouth and, raising him in her strong arms, drew him up on the couch so that his head rested easily on the pillow.

She turned to Louise and smiled and said: "He live-a. You wash-a," and the girl knelt beside him and kept wiping his face with the dripping towel, while the old woman rapidly took off his necktie and unbuttoned his collar.

Then she threw back the coat and the vest, and, producing a sharp Mexican knife, she cut away the shirt and under-shirt from his left side, and disclosed his chest all covered with blood—and at that instant Jack gave a long whistling sigh, and opened his eyes.

Louise uttered a little sob of joy, and the old woman said something rapidly in Spanish to Jack. His eyes showed that he understood, but he said nothing. He looked lovingly at Louise as she continued to bathe his forehead and wipe away the blood that still trickled slowly from his mouth. The old woman turned quickly and said, "Aguardiente!" and Mr. Morliss handed her the flask of whiskey which he held ready.

She said a few words to Jack, and gently raised his head and held the flask to his lips. With some difficulty Jack took a few swallows and his eyes slowly grew brighter.

Then the woman washed the blood from his chest and revealed two wounds—one a long horizontal cut directly over the heart, the other a harmless looking little wound not an inch long, higher up and nearer the side. The cut over the heart bled profusely, but the other one scarcely at all. The old woman smiled at the long wound, but she shook her head and muttered gravely as she examined the other.

Jack's lips moved as if he were trying to speak, and Louise, bending down to him, caught the whispered word, "Garder."

"Yes, Jack," she said; "he shall come. Be quiet, please, so the wounds will stop bleeding. They are not serious."

She turned quickly to the table and took a piece of paper. "To-morrow is Sunday," she remembered. "Mr. Garder will be at the house."

She wrote the address, and then: "Jack dangerously wounded. Come at once. Louise."

"Father," she said, "take this and go as fast as you can to the village. Find Mr. Caspar and have him send a man on horseback to Guanajuato at once and bring back the best American surgeon that Mr. Caspar knows, and send this telegram at the same time. Hurry, father, dear, as you never hurried before."

She thrust the paper into his hand and gave him his hat, and the old man, longing to do something, and glad to be instructed, rushed from the house and sped down the path to the village.

Then Louise turned again to Jack and worked with the old Mexican woman, keeping wet cloths pressed tightly over the wounds, renewing them every few moments.

Jack lay silent but conscious, too weak from loss of blood to speak. His breath came in labored, whistling puffs. Now and then he groaned slightly as the pain grew too severe for endurance—and then Louise gently wiped his forehead and lips with fresh, cold water. At intervals the old woman gave him a few swallows of the whiskey.

Now, as they worked and waited in that silent mountain cottage, miles distant from any surgical help, Louise knew, for good and all, how deeply and truly she loved this man who had crowned all his devotion with nearly the sacrifice of his life. She would not think of the possibility of his not recovering—but she felt that he should never leave her again without knowing that she loved him.

In an hour Morliss returned with Mr. Caspar. A messenger had been dispatched post-haste to Guanajuato, and the surgeon should arrive in two or three hours at the latest.

Caspar came to the side of the couch and Jack faintly smiled a recognition, but did not try to speak. The hemorrhage from his lungs had almost entirely stopped, but he felt himself as if the least movement would start it again. Caspar looked at the wounds and said, cheerfully: "You are a very fortunate man, Mr. Stelwyn. There is nothing dangerous here; but it was a close call. You are faint from loss of blood only. Keep perfectly quiet. The doctor will be here soon."

He signaled to Louise, and she followed him out to the porch.

"One of those wounds is very ugly, Miss Random," he said, anxiously. "It has pierced the lung—how deep there's no telling. Did he bleed much from the mouth?"

"Oh, a great deal at first," she said; "but it seems to have stopped now."

"Unfortunately—or rather fortunately in this instance—we know a good deal about knife wounds in this country. Old Dolores is doing the very best thing. That deep wound must be kept open from the exterior, and I fear it will be a long siege for the poor fellow. Did he tell anything about it? Mr. Stelwyn is very popular here. I cannot think of any reason for this murderous attack."

"He only said a few words," answered Louise. "It was an old enemy from the North. Mr. Stelwyn said that he had killed him, and then he fainted."

"The man must have been disguised," said Caspar. He stepped to a chair and showed Louise a Mexican sombrero. "Your father and I picked this up on the trail a little below here as we came up to the cottage. There was nothing else to be seen. To-morrow we must investigate."

Louise hurried back to Jack's side, and Caspar followed her into the room.

Stelwyn's eyes, as they met those of Louise, seemed to convey a request, and his lips moved slightly. She bent her head and he whispered, "Caspar."

"He wishes to tell you something, Mr. Caspar," she said. "Please don't try to talk, Jack."

Caspar kneeled down and brought his ear to Jack's lips and Jack whispered slowly, with frequent short pauses and gasps for breath: "I—threw him—over cliff. Identify—to-morrow. Random—knows him."

"All right, Mr. Stelwyn," said Caspar, as he rose. "I understand, we will attend to it all to-morrow. Keep quiet now, and don't worry."

At midnight the doctor arrived, guided up the path by one of Caspar's men.

After carefully examining the two wounds he said: "These blows must both have been delivered with great force." He put his hand in Stelwyn's coat pocket and drew out the thick envelope full of papers. "Ah! I thought so," he said. "This has saved your life, Mr. Stelwyn." The

package was soaked in blood—and was torn across the bottom and pierced through at the top.

"The blow that glanced along the ribs made this rent at the bottom," said the doctor, "and the other blow lost more than half its power by having to get through this thick bunch of papers."

Mr. Morliss exclaimed, fervently: "Thank God! I said a man's life was in that package. I did not know it was Mr. Stelwyn's life."

Louise, who was kneeling beside Jack's head, bathing his forehead, saw his lips move again. As she bent down to him he whispered: "The papers, Louise. Take them—Garder."

"Yes, Jack," she said. "Doctor, he wishes me to keep those papers for a friend who is coming," and as she took the blood-stained package she could hardly refrain from kissing it before them all.

"Mother," said the doctor, in Spanish, "you have done just the right thing. Keep up the cold water and pressure over the stab. Now," he continued to the others, "we must get our patient to bed. This room is nice and airy. Can we put up a bed here?"

"Of course we can," said Louise.

She opened the door to the large bedroom, which she had been occupying, and in a few moments the bed was moved into the outer room and placed opposite the open door, so that the air from the windows and from the door must pass over it.

The three men and the Mexican woman lifted the couch with Stelwyn upon it and placed it close beside the bed.

"Now, please strip the bed to the mattress," said the doctor. "Miss Random, if you will excuse us for a moment we will undress our patient and put him to bed."

Louise went out to the veranda and the doctor said: "Mr. Stelwyn, please don't try to help us. Don't move a muscle. I am going to spoil your clothes, but I can't have that hemorrhage start again."

He took a sharp knife and cut away the sleeves of Jack's coat, and cut the coat and vest and shirt so that they all lay free beneath him. The trousers were easily removed, and the underclothes were left.

"Now, the sheet, please," said the doctor. Gently, little

by little, he raised Stelwyn's body so as gradually to slip the sheet under him.

"Take one corner, mother," he said in Spanish. "Now, gentlemen, together—strongly but easily."

They lifted the sheet with Stelwyn, and gently laid it upon the bed.

Jack had not moved nor seemed to suffer any inconvenience and, as the doctor placed a pillow under his head, he gave a little wheezy sigh of comfort.

"That will do for the present, Mr. Stelwyn," said the doctor, as he drew the upper sheet over him. "A long sleep now and you will be on the right road."

He prepared some medicine and gave it to Jack, and then he called Louise.

"There is nothing more to be done now, Miss Random," he said—like everyone else, he had recognized Louise as the head of the family. "You and your father and the old lady must see that the cold compresses are kept over the small wound and keep the wound washed and open. The other one is of no consequence. It will heal in a few days. Above all things, keep him still and keep him from worrying. The worst to fear now is a fever. He will sleep soon, and the longer the better. I will come again in the forenoon, and will bring proper bandages. Do not give him anything unless a little whiskey if he grows faint."

After a few more words the doctor and Mr. Caspar departed.

"Father," said Louise, "you must go now and get some sleep. I will sit here with Jack until morning."

She brought a fresh pail of water and fresh towels, and drew a chair to the bedside.

Jack's eyes followed her, and as she came to the bed he said in a voice just above a whisper: "Please—Louise—no—Dolores."

She laid her hand gently on his forehead and said: "Jack, you are not to speak or to move. Shut your eyes and try to go to sleep. Won't you—just to make me happy?" and as Jack obediently closed his eyes she laid a fresh wet towel over the long wound which now only bled slowly, and then she pressed another wet cloth over the smaller wound and held it strongly in place.

"I will lie down here on the couch, dear," said her father, "so you can call me in a moment."

So Louise and Dolores sat by the bedside through the long hours of the night, relieving each other in keeping the cold cloths pressed over the wound, and Jack slept the sleep of exhaustion until seven o'clock in the morning.

Then he opened his eyes and said with a little more strength in his voice:

"Louise, you poor little girl. You have been up all night with me, and I have been sleeping like a great healthy lout. I feel well now. If you don't go at once and sleep I will get up."

Jack's voice faded to a whisper as he finished and he scowled angrily to find that he was still so weak.

"I will go, Jack," said the girl, "if you will promise to be good and lie still. Father will sit here while Dolores and I rest."

Mr. Morliss came forward quickly and took the chair, and with a light hand laid on Jack's forehead, a parting caress, Louise left the room, and the old woman followed her.

In an hour Dolores returned with some breakfast for Mr. Morliss. She set it on the table and by gesticulations and Spanish-English, and finally by a firm hand upon his arm, drove him from his place and sat down herself by the bed. In a few moments Jack was again dozing.

At ten o'clock Louise appeared, looking as fresh as if she had slept all the night.

Dolores glanced at her with a smile and a nod of approval, and, without a word, got up and surrendered her position and disappeared.

Together Louise and her father kept up the work until eleven o'clock, when the doctor and Mr. Caspar appeared.

"Miss Random," said Caspar, "I have brought a nice little Mexican boy with me. He is out on the porch, and will stay here. He understands English, and is a faithful little fellow and he loves Mr. Stelwyn. Let him help you in every way that he can. Send him on all the errands and let him help Dolores and watch the patient when you are all tired. He will do just as you tell him."

The doctor had been examining the wounded man. "So!" he said. "Very well, Mr. Stelwyn, you have had excellent

nursing. You are much better, sir," and Jack smiled a feeble smile of encouragement.

The doctor arranged his bandages and impressed upon his patient the necessity of keeping perfectly still, and then he called Louise to the veranda.

"There is a little fever, Miss Random," he said, "but I expected some. It may not grow worse. Above all things, keep him quiet and don't let him worry." Then he gave her some medicines and wrote out full instructions as to diet and treatment of the wound and the administering of the medicines.

"I will come again to-morrow morning," he said. "From present indications there should be no serious trouble. A few weeks will make him as strong and well as ever."

Louise clasped her hands joyfully, and a glad light came into her eyes, so that the doctor said, kindly: "You must not wear *yourself* out, Miss Random. I think Mr. Stelwyn will not thank me if I cure him and leave you sick. Do not worry and watch. Get all the sleep you can."

As they returned to the house Mr. Caspar beckoned to Mr. Morliss.

"Mr. Random," he said, "Mr. Stelwyn intimated last night that you would be able to identify the man who attacked him."

"I certainly know the man whose name he mentioned," replied Morliss.

"His body is in the village, sir. He was thrown from the top of the cliff down to the rocks below. His features are not disfigured, and I think Mr. Stelwyn would like to have you go with me to look at him, so that there may be no mistake. From papers found in his pocket we judge his name to be Thomas Sconer."

"That is his name, sir," said Morliss. "I will go with you at once."

The doctor and Caspar and Morliss went down to the village together.

As Morliss looked at the white dead face of the man who had so cruelly injured him, he turned quickly away with a shudder of pitying abhorrence.

"It is Thomas Sconer," he said.

"The village authorities have taken possession of the money and papers found upon the body," said Caspar. "After deducting the expense of his burial they will hold the

rest to be delivered to his relatives. Do you know of any connections of the man's, Mr. Random? He was from Compos, was he not?"

"Yes," said Morliss. He stopped, and his heart ached for poor Ralph. "Mr. Ralph Sconer is his son," he said. "A good, noble boy. This will hurt him sorely—but he must know of it." He gave them Ralph's address, and then, with that dead face still before his eyes, he turned and hurried back up the path to the cottage.

The mood of despair was upon him again. As he walked he looked back over his life. Surely a curse had been upon him. He had brought only misery and unhappiness to himself and to all with whom he had come in contact. He had failed in all his undertakings. He had made his wife miserable through her life, and had been indirectly the cause of her death. His evil fortune had caused expense and anxiety to his friend Ralph—and the same evil fortune had pursued him into Mexico, and had caused the wounding of Stelwyn, whom he loved almost as he loved Louise—and with that the death of Ralph's father. Where would it end? Would it ever end except with his life?

He had reached that fatal little platform, the scene of Stelwyn's encounter with Sconer.

He looked about for a moment, and then walked to the edge of the cliff and looked down.

"It is terrible, but sure," he murmured. He remembered his brave leap into the dark river.

"Father!" called a fresh, cheerful voice. He turned and saw Louise just coming from the path above. She ran to him.

"Jack is so much better!" she said, joyfully. "He has a little color in his face, and he begins to talk as he used to talk. I ran out for a moment to get a breath of exercise and to meet you, father dear."

The old man stooped and kissed the bright face of the girl, and then he said: "It was very sweet of you, dear, to come to meet me. You are my good angel, darling. Come, we will go home. I am very glad Mr. Stelwyn is better."

## CHAPTER XXVIII

IN FEBRI VERITAS

Louise had been sadly mistaken in her belief that Jack was better. The color in his face and the stronger, readier voice were not due to increasing strength, but to increasing fever. He grew restless through the afternoon, and his eyes became strangely bright. He persisted in talking or trying to talk in spite of all her entreaties, and in spite of the fact that his words came singly—in puffs—as if he had been running and was out of breath.

He made light of his wounds and chafed at his imprisonment. "Louise," he said, "they—are—nothing. Two little—scratches. You mustn't—worry and—wait on me—little girl. I feel—strong. I will be—up to-morrow," and then the breath came shorter and quicker, and he lay still for a few moments until the fever urged him to another restless movement and another attempt to assure her that he was perfectly well.

Louise recognized the fever—and Dolores recognized it. The old woman looked at Jack's eyes when he began to talk, and then, with a little smiling nod to Louise, she disappeared.

Louise prepared the medicine which the doctor had marked for fever, and induced Jack to take the dose.

"You mustn't talk, Jack," she said, gently. "I know you are better; but try to keep quiet until to-morrow."

She laid her hand upon his forehead and almost drew it back again. She was frightened at the burning heat.

"Oh, that feels good," said Jack, as he raised his right hand and laid it over her hand and pressed it down, and the girl's hand was literally between two fires.

She looked about for Dolores—and she looked at her father, sitting near the bed and leaning forward, eagerly watching.

"Can I do anything, Louise," asked the old man.

"Please bring some fresh, cold water, father," she said.

and she wet a towel and laid it over Jack's forehead, and then with another towel she moistened his face and his hands and arms. She looked at the fever medicine. "A teaspoonful every half hour until fever abates," it read.

It was only ten minutes since she had given him the last dose—but she resolutely poured out another teaspoonful and made Jack take it.

Still he was restless—burning with fever and only kept from talking by Louise watching his eyes and holding up a finger when she saw he was about to speak. In the meantime she kept the cold water going, and wondered where Dolores was.

But presently the old woman came in with a cup in her hand. She smiled to Louise and, stepping quickly to the bedside, she raised Jack's head with one hand and held the cup to his lips with the other. Jack looked at her and said something, and she answered him vigorously, almost angrily, and Jack swallowed the draught.

The old woman sat down by Louise and explained volubly and with many gestures, where she had been and what she had given Stelwyn, and Louise understood nothing of it all.

But while Dolores talked Louise was watching Jack, and she saw his eyes slowly close, and when she put her hand on his forehead it was moist.

And Jack slept without much trouble until morning, and awoke with but little fever.

Pedro, the little Mexican boy, was sent down to Mr. Caspar's early Monday morning, and he returned with a telegram from Garder, dated on Sunday: "Will start on afternoon train. Get surgeon from Guanajuato."

"The dear old man," said Louise. "He had only just reached home and turned about at once. What did I write in that telegram? He must be dreadfully worried."

At eleven o'clock the doctor arrived. He examined the wound and expressed his satisfaction. To Louise he said: "When did that fever come on, Miss Random, and how long did it last?"

Louise told him of the high fever and the restlessness of the afternoon, and how she had given two doses of the fever medicine without effect, and how the cup of something that Dolores had prepared seemed to stop the fever and put him to sleep at once.

And the doctor smiled, as doctors do. "My dear Miss Random," he said, "I know the harmless herb compounds that these poor Mexicans use. Let her give it to him as often as she sees fit. Of course, you know it was the medicine that you gave him that stopped the fever."

So having explained that matter, the doctor continued: "The fever is coming again, Miss Random. I am afraid it will grow worse for a time. It will come in the afternoon, and we must fight it for some days. Don't be alarmed. He is strong and vigorous. There is no danger. The wound is doing admirably. Give him the medicine as soon as he shows symptoms of fever. I will come again at five o'clock," and with a smile and a bow the doctor went his way.

Jack seemed quiet and comfortable through the forenoon, dozing most of the time, and at one o'clock Mr. Morliss, restless at his confinement, and thinking of a sketch that he wished to make, yielded to Louise's urging and, taking his sketch-book, left the house.

Dolores was busy in the kitchen or elsewhere, and Louise sat alone with Jack. In a few moments the patient began to grow restless. He groaned in his sleep and threw out his arms, and Louise, taking his hands, felt that the fever was upon him again.

She quickly poured out the medicine and stood ready for the moment when he should awake.

As he opened his eyes she involuntarily drew back with a little shudder. The eyes were looking at her, but they did not see her. They seemed to be looking through and beyond her. They were strange and terrible. Then Jack spoke:

"Damn it, Slick," he said; "you are fooling away time. Morliss is in prison, and he is innocent. I will get him out, if you can't."

The girl laid her hand upon his forehead, and said in a trembling voice: "Jack, dear, it is time for the medicine now. Come, take it, like a good boy."

His eyes softened, and he said in his natural voice: "I must have been dreaming, Louise. Thank you," and he took the dose quietly and, as she smoothed out the pillow, he laid his head down again.

She took his hand and gently stroked it. She was inwardly trembling as she watched him.

*In a moment he drew away his hand quickly and half rose*

in the bed. His eyes again had the look of delirium. They gazed at her but did not see her.

"Louise," he said, in an eager whisper.

"Yes, Jack," she answered; "lie down, please, and try to sleep," and she took him gently by the shoulders to force him back to the pillow. But he resisted, and, his eyes close to her own, did not see the tears that were coming.

"Louise," he said, she knew that he did not know her. "Darling little girl, I have loved you so dearly—and now to lose you."

The tears were coming fast now as she said: "Jack, I am here."

"You?" he said. "Are you Louise?" Still his eyes had no meaning for her.

"Yes, dear, I am Louise. I am here with you always. Won't you lie down again, Jack?" She pressed her hand upon his forehead.

"You are not Louise," he said. "Louise is the dearest little girl in all the world. Are you really Louise?"

"Yes, Jack, don't you know me?"

The poor girl looked about for her father or Dolores, but she did not dare to call.

"Do you know how much I love you, darling?"

"Yes, Jack; I know. Please try to sleep now, dear."

"You love me, don't you, sweetheart?" Still the same far-off look in his eyes.

"Yes, Jack; I love you. I shall always love you." She had hard work to restrain the sobs now.

"I am very tired, Louise, dear; please kiss me good-night, and I—think—I shall sleep."

He was growing drowsy, but still the fiery eyes, half closed as they were, looked far beyond her with an expression of intense longing.

She glanced quickly about the room, and then with an arm thrown lightly about his neck, she bent and kissed him, and, as she lifted her glowing face from his, Jack's head settled down easily upon the pillow.

He murmured: "Thank you, dear," and those terrible eyes were closed.

She watched him silently for a moment, and, dipping her handkerchief in the basin of fresh water, she wiped her own eyes and tried to cool her burning cheeks.

Then, as Jack seemed to sleep, she stepped to the veranda and called the Mexican boy.

"Pedro," she whispered, "he is asleep now. Please sit by him for a few moments and call me if he wakes."

The boy came quickly, and silently took the chair by the bedside, and Louise went to her room.

In twenty minutes she had done with those feelings that had seemed to compel her to be alone, and she came back and took Pedro's place, strong and cool, and ready once more. She laid her hand softly on Jack's forehead and found it moist. The fever was broken for the time. But she held the medicine in her hand and waited with a strange dread—for the awakening.

Jack slept quietly for a half hour longer. Then he moved slightly and, as she laid her hand upon his, he opened his eyes, the old blue reasonable eyes, and she could not restrain a little sigh of thankfulness.

He smiled as he looked at her.

"I feel awfully ashamed of myself, Louise," he said. "I just lie here like a useless log, and you tire yourself out watching my stupidity."

"You are a good sleeper, Jack," she said, cheerfully. "It's a pleasure to watch you. Do you know how long you have slept?"

"What time is it now?" he asked.

"Nearly five o'clock."

"And I began to slumber and snore at half-past one." He stopped and knitted his brows for an instant as if trying to remember something. "It seems as if I had been dreaming," he said. "Louise, did I talk in my sleep?"

"Yes—a little, Jack," she answered, and she could not keep back the quick blood that mounted to her cheeks.

Jack, looking at her, suddenly blushed also, and then he said: "I won't ask you to tell me what rubbish I talked. Of course it was something disgraceful. Please don't lay it up against me, Louise. You know when a man talks in his sleep, the devil seems to have entered into him, and he always says just the opposite of what he really thinks and feels."

Poor Jack was wondering what awful things he could have said to make her blush so at the recollection of them.

And Louise, divining his thought, smiled as she laid her hand upon his forehead and said: "Don't be disturbed,

Jack. You didn't say anything very terrible. You only swore a little, and I wasn't much shocked."

But though Jack smiled and seemed satisfied he continued to think, and try to recall his dream, and imagine shamedly, what abhorrent things he might have said.

But for the relief of both, the doctor and Mr. Morliss appeared, and soon after came old Dolores with a special dish that she had prepared for Jack's supper, and after some conversation between the doctor and Dolores, the former graciously signified his approval, and the patient was permitted to eat, and he enjoyed it, so that the heart of old Dolores was glad, and her respect for the doctor was increased.

The wounds were dressed and the patient was refreshed by an alcohol sponge bath and a change of garments from his grip-sack, which had arrived from Guanajuato.

"He will sleep well to-night, Miss Random," said the doctor. "The fever will continue to come in the afternoon, but it will gradually grow less. Was it severe to-day?"

"He was a little delirious," she said, "for a short time only—and then the medicine quieted him."

"That is nothing alarming" said the doctor. "A strong and healthy man like Mr. Stelwyn is very apt to have his brains rattled by a fever. We must go slow, however. In three or four weeks he will be pretty well."

Late that evening, when her father and Dolores had disappeared, Louise bent over the sleeping patient and softly touched her lips to his cheek. Then she summoned Pedro to sit at the bedside.

She went out to the veranda and lay down in the hammock, but she did not look at the beautiful moonlit valley below. She pressed both hands over her eyes and again and again she repeated to herself every word that Jack had spoken in his delirium.

Jack was better throughout the next day. There was no more raving, and only a light fever in the afternoon. Wednesday was still better, and on Thursday morning Louise and her father left the patient to Dolores and Pedro, and went to Guanajuato to meet Mr. Garder.

She was the first to see the old lawyer as he alighted from the train, and she ran to him as she would to her own father. She felt that all was right and safe as soon as she saw that steady, kind old face.

"Jack must be better," said Garder, with a smile, as he kissed her.

"Yes, he is much better," she replied, "and he is longing to see you, Mr. Garder."

"Well, well! so he needs legal advice. We will attend to his case presently." He shook hands with Mr. Morliss, and they all climbed into the conveyance which Louise had provided. The driver cracked his long whip and the mules jumped to a gallop, which speedily became a slow jog-trot.

"Now, little girl, tell me all about it," said Garder.

They sat together on the rear seat, and Mr. Morliss was with the driver. He leaned back and listened earnestly as Louise began at the beginning and told Mr. Garder the history of the conspiracy—how Stelwyn had employed the detective to watch Thomas Sconer—and all that had been discovered, how they had planned and managed the escape of her father, and then how the confession of Sconer had been obtained.

"I would have told you all this long ago, Mr. Garder," she said, "but Jack wanted to get the evidence completed before he gave it to you—and so —"

"And so the boy had to suffer a little for his foolishness. He's all right now, you said, Louise?"

"Oh, yes, he's getting well very fast now," and then, more slowly and with a voice that was less steady, she told of how Jack had returned to the cottage after Sconer had attacked him, and that the first words he uttered were—"Wire for Garder."

She passed lightly over the anxious hours that followed until the doctor arrived, and told Mr. Garder that the doctor had assured her that there was no danger.

At this point Mr. Morliss said: "You fo get about the papers, Louise. All the proofs that Mr. Stelwyn had been collecting for me, Mr. Garder, were in his coat pocket in an envelope—and the doctor said that those papers were what saved his life."

"There is a sort of compensation in circumstances sometimes," said the lawyer gravely. "What became of Sconer, Louise?"

"Oh—didn't you know?" she answered, in an awed undertone. "He was killed. In the struggle he was thrown from the edge of the cliff."

"Ah!" said Garder, quietly. "That is better. It clears the air, and, by the way, that reminds me that this Mexican sunshine is very hot." He took off his hat and wiped the perspiration from his face and fanned himself a moment with the hat—while he thought—and the mules plodded slowly up the steep, rocky road under the burning sun.

"I'm rather proud of Jack," he said presently. "Aren't you, Louise?" He turned toward her with one of his queer smiles.

The girl's face flushed a little, but she said bravely: "Of course I am proud of him, Mr. Garder, proud that he has done and suffered so much for father and for me." She looked at the lawyer with a certain defiance in her eyes.

"But sometimes Jack is an awful fool. There, little girl, don't be angry. You know I love him nearly as much as you—nearly as much as I love you, that is."

Jack had been restless and feverish with impatience and eagerness for Garder to arrive—but when he walked into the cottage with Louise and her father, Jack said very calmly: "Hulloa, old man! Sorry to put you to all this trouble, but I thought you hadn't seen enough of this great Mexico."

And Garder, who had been distressed and worried beyond expression ever since he had received Louise's telegram, came up quietly and shook hands with Jack, and said:

"Trouble! You are ten times more trouble than all my other clients together. When will you get over being such a fool, Jack?"

So the words—but the eyes and the hand-clasp said other things.

"Louise," said Jack. "Did you tell Garder about our conspiracy?"

"Yes, Jack, he knows it all now—and he's going to help us."

"H'm—so!" said the lawyer, "you people seem to be getting along pretty well without legal advice."

"Louise, give his worship that package of papers, please. I think they are still legible?" said Jack.

Louise brought the torn and blood-stained envelope and handed it to Mr. Garder.

"That's a pretty-looking document to give to a lawyer," he growled—but Louise noticed that his hand trembled as he

took it—and he turned quickly away and walked to the window—as if to have a better light to examine it.

“Sit down at the table,” said Jack, “and go through it carefully—then I want to talk with you.”

The old man sat down and wiped his glasses and, opening the envelope, he carefully took out all the papers and arranged them according to dates.

“Louise,” he said, “will you please have a little flour paste made so we can stick these torn pieces together?”

Then he began and read silently and attentively through the different affidavits and statements and reports. Jack and Mr. Morliss watched him eagerly, but he did not look up nor ask a question until he had finished reading the last paper. Then he laid them all before him and took off his glasses and balanced them in his hand, while he looked thoughtfully at the log rafters above.

“Well,” said Jack.

“I am sorry you did not tell me of all this before, Jack,” he answered.

“Well, you old solemn-face, I’ve told you now.”

“Yes! Mr. Morliss, there is only one way by which you can be cleared, and that is by a new trial.”

“A new trial!” said Jack, indignantly. “Do you mean to say that a man has got to be tried for a crime that another man has confessed?”

“Softly, Jack, softly! Mr. Morliss has been convicted of a crime. He is now proved to be innocent—but no judgment rendered can be reversed except by a new trial with the defendant in court. It will be only a formality—probably. Leave the whole matter to me. With these papers I think I can arrange it—but when I have it satisfactorily fixed Mr. Morliss must come to Compos and surrender himself to the sheriff and appear again in court.

“I am ready to go whenever you say, Mr. Garder,” said Morliss.

“It is the only way, Mr. Morliss. You will pardon me for saying that at present in the eye of the law you are only an escaped convict. Though every person in the world were convinced of your innocence—though the heavens should open and the Angel of the Lord proclaim your innocence you are not innocent in the law until you have been again tried and acquitted.”

"Well, it's a beautiful law, isn't it?" said Jack, in disgust.

"It is the law, my boy," said Garder, "and your opinion nor my opinion will not change it. There is no great hardship or trouble in this case. It is merely a formality—but it must be complied with, if, as we all desire, Mr. Morliss is to be legally restored to his position in society."

"Very well, Garder," said Jack, with some signs of weariness. "Get to work at once, and when the ways are all greased Mr. Morliss and I will appear and stand our trial."

At this moment Louise came in with the paste. She took the papers herself and carefully joined the torn portions by pasting strips behind them.

Mr. Garder took the package again. "The appearance of these documents is a good bit of circumstantial evidence, Jack," he said, with a smile. "A man does not often put such a seal upon his affidavits."

"It's good blood, Garder," said Jack. "It won't hurt your court proceedings to introduce a little of that stuff into them."

"The courts would be in a sorry case if they had much of your blood in their management," said the lawyer.

In the afternoon Jack had a high fever. The excitement and talk of the morning had been too much for his strength. Louise sat by the bedside constantly, while Garder and Morliss talked on the veranda and strolled about the mountain-side. It was nearly five o'clock before the fever yielded to the repeated doses of medicine. Then, at last, Jack subsided into a quiet sleep and Louise breathed relief once more.

No urging could induce Mr. Garder to stay over night.

"I must get this matter in shape at once," he said. "For your sake, first, dear, and then for Jack's sake, I am anxious to have it righted."

As he kissed Louise good-by he said: "You and Jack have been running away beyond my reckoning, dear. I don't know what may happen next. You won't altogether forget me even if Jack does, will you?"

She blushed as she answered: "I can never forget you, Mr. Garder, and I know Jack never can"—and then she blushed still more—at assuming to speak for Jack.

The old man laughed and shook his head—and Mr. Morliss and Pedro escorted him down to the village.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### THE GENTLEMAN WINS THE PRIZE

One afternoon a week later, Louise sat alone on the cottage veranda, looking out over the valley. Mr. Morliss and Pedro had gone to Guanajuato to bring back a trunk of Jack's belongings that had been sent by express from Compos. For Jack had demanded and the doctor had promised vaguely that "in a few days" he should arise and be clothed.

The fever had almost entirely left him, and the wound was so far healed internally that the doctor was satisfied to let the outside cut heal also.

They had received one message from Garder. All was going well and he would come for them in about two weeks.

Jack was asleep and Louise sat near the open window, where she could look in and see him, and could also command a view of the approach where the path emerged from the thicket below.

It was late in the afternoon. The sun behind the cottage was invisible to her, but she could mark its progress by the shadows in the valley below. The village was already shaded, and she watched the wave of darkness slowly creep up the low ridge beyond, eating up the brightness until the last glowing peak was swallowed, and the shadow swept onward and seized the higher range beyond Guanajuato, painting upon it the distorted silhouette of the intervening ridge.

She was very happy. That creeping shadow had no sinister meaning for her bright, hopeful nature. It suggested only restfulness and peace, the gentle approach of the friendly night with its cool, refreshing touch.

She looked up and saw a man come from the path and approach the cottage slowly, and she recognized Ralph Sconer.

Suddenly the shadow that she had been watching seemed to have fallen upon her and entered into her soul. The light of

happiness was gone as the sunlight of the mountain peak had been engulfed. She thought of everything at once—of Ralph's kindness—of his disbelief in her father—of his love for her—of his final knowledge of his own father's guilt—*of the fact that Stelwyn had killed Ralph's father*, and that Jack was lying wounded and sick in the house.

She stepped quickly into the room, and bending over the man whom she now loved more than all the world—yes, even more than she loved her father, she made sure that he was sleeping soundly, and then she quietly came out upon the veranda and met Ralph as he reached the steps.

Before he could speak she had taken his hand and said, in a low voice, "Ralph, I saw you coming and I went in to see if Mr. Stelwyn was awake. He has been very feverish, you know, and we must be careful about exciting him."

It was cruel to Ralph. Louise for the moment was like a tigress defending her young. But what she said was not the thoughtless cruelty of the tigress. It was the deliberate and then quick cut of the surgeon's knife. It instantly severed Ralph's last thread of hope, and her honest, straight-forward nature had wished Ralph to know finally and fully that he could never hope to have her love. She was willing to have him know that she loved Stelwyn. She was aggressively ready to defend Stelwyn against anything that Ralph might say. She would have spoken bitter things—even about Ralph's father—had Ralph dared to blame Stelwyn for his death.

So much for the womanly imagination.

Ralph, after hearing the full report of the death of his father—and identifying the papers found upon his body—had come up to the cottage to assure himself that Louise was there and to clear his conscience by an honorable apology to Mr. Morliss. Neither fathers nor sweethearts nor deaths could ever swerve Ralph from the line of his duty—as he understood it.

"Louise," he said quietly, "I will not disturb Mr. Stelwyn. I once intruded upon him—to my sorrow. I understand the matter fully now. I have been strangely misled. I cannot think how. Is—is your father here?"

"He will be here soon, Ralph," said Louise. "Let us sit down on the steps." She was still nervously listening for a sound of Jack's awakening.

She seated herself on the upper step of the veranda, but Ralph stood leaning against the rail.

"I saw Mr. Garder after he returned from here," said Ralph.

"Did you?" answered Louise. She could not think of anything else to say.

"Yes, I had already received a communication from the village officials, and I went to see Mr. Garder before I came here. He gave me all the details."

"Ralph," she said, impulsively, "I am truly sorry for it all."

"Yes, I know, Louise, but it can't be helped now."

"Here they come!" said the girl suddenly, standing up, and Pedro appeared from the path, leading a mule with a trunk strapped upon its back. Mr. Morliss, with a stout orange stick in his hand, followed the mule.

Ralph stepped down to the front of the cottage and approached the old man.

"Mr. Morliss," he said, "I came up here only to see you. I want you to know that I feel that I did you an injustice in my mind—although I worked for you in spite of my wrong opinion. I am glad that you are to be cleared, although I suffer for it."

"Ralph, my dear boy," said Morliss, "this is very kind of you. Everything is all right now. I haven't felt hardly toward you. Come in—come in. We are just ready for supper."

"Thank you," said Ralph. "I must go back at once. My business here is completed and I shall take the train to-morrow morning."

He held out his hand to Louise, and as she took it with a strange feeling—half relief and half regret—he said: "Good-by, Louise, I shall not annoy you any more."

She only said: "Good-by, Ralph," and she stood silently watching him as he went down the path in the twilight, escorted by Pedro and the mule.

As Ralph disappeared from her sight in the shade of the thick branches that overhung the mountain path—so he disappeared from her life thenceforward.

He was true to his word. He did not annoy her again by letter or advice or even by his presence. In that long journey back to Compos he carefully weighed and considered the

whole matter in the light of his new knowledge—and he charged his interest in the Morliss family to account of profit and loss.

In ten years from that time he was comfortably married and the father of three serious little ones whom he loved—nearly as well as he loved his business—for he was the head of a great commission-house in Compos, and accounted one of the wealthiest men in the city. And so—Good-night to your honest averages—Mr. Ralph Sconer.

When Louise and her father entered the cottage Stelwyn was awake and sitting up in the bed.

“Did I hear a stranger’s voice, Louise?”

“Yes, Jack, but he has gone.”

“Who was it?”

“Ralph Sconer.”

Jack was silent for a moment—then he said: “Louise—of course he knew all about it. He knew that I was here?”

“Yes, Jack. I told him you were here—and sick.”

“He surely did not ask to see me?”

“No, he was here only a few moments. He came down—about his father.”

Jack lay back upon the pillow and sighed wearily. “It seems a long time,” he said. “I am sorry that it had to happen so. You don’t blame me for it all, do you, Louise?”

The girl instantly shook off the depression and regret that Ralph’s visit had produced.

“Why, Jack,” she said, cheerfully, “no one can blame you for anything, any more than we can blame Ralph Sconer for having such a father. We must all feel sorry for Ralph.”

“I asked him to stay, Mr. Stelwyn,” said Morliss, “but he said he must go back at once. I am very sorry for Ralph.”

“So am I, Mr. Morliss,” said Jack, “but I am glad that I was not obliged to see him.”

Of these three who talked of Ralph, it is probable that Louise had the most sympathy for him. She was in the beginning of a new and wonderful life. Her love for Stelwyn had taken complete possession of her intense nature—and yet—when Ralph’s departure had relieved her of the fear of an encounter between these two, she honestly remembered how earnestly, in his way, he had tried to be kind and helpful to her and to her father. She could never again say or listen to a derogatory word about him.

Mr. Morliss, happy in the prospect of a new freedom, and honor in his work, was genially disposed toward all the world. He was vaguely sorry that Ralph had suffered on his account—and also sorry that Ralph could not stay to congratulate him more fully.

Stelwyn, to tell the truth, cared nothing whatever about Ralph. He was sorry in a general sense, for the man whose father he had been forced to kill—but he felt no compunctions of conscience—and he was glad that Ralph had departed. He had regarded Ralph—only as an annoyance.

Two days later Jack was permitted to get out of bed and put on his clothes, and as soon as this feat was accomplished he thankfully dropped down upon the lounge, which had been brought out to the veranda. He was perplexed and distressed at his first experience of getting out of a long season in bed. He could not understand the instability of his legs. He seemed to have unlearned the art of standing and walking.

“C'est le premier pas qui coute.” Once on his feet again Jack speedily recalled his knowledge of their use. It required the united efforts of Louise and Mr. Morliss and old Dolores, backed by the stern commands of the doctor, to keep him for three days within the limits prescribed—the cottage and its veranda. He was not permitted to descend the steps, and he was compelled to spend most of the day in the hammock or upon the lounge.

On the fourth day after Jack's resurrection, he was lounging in the hammock at five o'clock in the afternoon, feebly struggling with his first cigarette—striving to persuade himself that it had the old seductive flavor. Louise sat near the hammock and Mr. Morliss at the other end of the veranda with his easel before him, was retouching and correcting his painting of the evening valley that lay before them.

So it happened that Mr. Garder, who had not forewarned them of his coming, had nearly reached the steps before he was observed.

Then Louise sprang joyfully to meet him, and Jack, left unguarded, slipped from the hammock and got down the steps—contrary to orders—before anyone could stay him. Mr. Morliss, becoming aware that something was happening, laid down his palette and brush and with a regretful look at his painting, came forward to see what was the matter.

“Throw away that cigarette, Jack,” said Garder, as he

released Louise from his arms and shook hands with Stelwyn. "A man has no business to ruin his one sound lung with those things."

He turned to Morliss. "I am very glad to see you, sir," he said. "I have good news for you. May I look at that painting you were working at?" He took Morliss by the arm and went up to the picture. Louise took Jack's arm and tried to assist him in following—but Jack assisted her.

"Queer old duck, isn't he?" said Jack in a half whisper. "Let him alone, Louise. He'll tell us when he gets thoroughly ready."

Mr. Garder stood in front of the painting, his head a little on one side, studying it with the eye of a critic, and Morliss watched him with more interest in his judgment of the picture than he had in the news that the others anxiously waited for.

"That is certainly very fine, Mr. Morliss," said Garder. "I believe the fellows that I left raving over your former work will think this is the best—don't you agree with me, Jack?"

"Oh, come down to earth, Garder," said Stelwyn. "Tell us what you mean and what you know, and don't talk in the air."

"Mr. Morliss, I congratulate you," said Garder, seizing the hand of the bewildered and happy old artist. "You are already famous in Compos. This painting will add to your glory."

He drew a newspaper from his pocket, folded it carefully, and handed it to Louise. "There's a little paragraph in the 'Searcher' that will be of interest. Read it aloud, young lady," he said.

She took the paper and glanced at the heading, then looked up at Mr. Garder—but he had turned his back to the company, and stood with hands behind him, gazing across the slowly darkening valley.

"Jack," she said, "please get into the hammock again. Come, father, draw up a chair," and she stood by the veranda rail and read.

"Tardy Justice to John Morliss, the Artist.

"A collection of paintings on exhibition in the galleries of Messrs. Framer & Co. has attracted much attention and elicited the highest encomiums from art critics and art lovers.

Probably but few of those who have admired these master-pieces know the story of the artist, John Morliss, the story of a man devoted to his art for his art's sake—unrecognized and almost unknown, solely because he had never tried to bring himself before the public. It is probable that these beautiful paintings would have remained in obscurity—at least during the life of the artist—had it not been for the extraordinary events which seemed to justify a few of his friends in acting upon their own judgment. An unparalleled connection of unfortunate circumstances brought Mr. Morliss, an innocent man, before the grand jury—thence to a trial—and from the court-house to the penitentiary.

"Chafing under his unjust imprisonment, he planned and effected an escape, and has succeeded in avoiding recapture. In the meantime his friends have collected evidence in his behalf, proving his innocence beyond a doubt. It is understood that they have secured a full confession from the man who committed the crime for which Mr. Morliss was unjustly imprisoned. It is further stated by reliable authorities that the courts will at once reverse the sentence and acquit Mr. Morliss. We tender our congratulations, first, to a fellow-citizen whose grievous wrong is to be righted, then, to the artist whose magnificent work, so long concealed, has come upon us like a sudden burst of sunlight from a cloud."

The old man had listened as if in a dream. His eyes never moved from the girl's lips as she read. When it was finished he extended a trembling hand and said: "Please give me the paper, dear—I would like to see that all myself."

Mr. Garder turned with a slow smile.

"I must ask your pardon, Mr. Morliss," he said, "for the liberty which I took with your paintings. You know, Louise left me the key of the house and I went prowling about the place one afternoon more than two weeks ago. What I saw in that attic studio of yours induced me to make another visit with two friends—whose opinions are recognized authority in the Compos art world. Between us we agreed that, whether you liked it or not, we would not permit your work to be any longer hidden from an appreciative public. Framer told me before I left Compos that he could have sold a dozen of the pictures several times over, had he known what price to ask. We did not quite dare to give him the right to sell anything or to name any price without your authority. When

you reach home in a few days you can act as you think best in the matter."

Morliss was dazed. There were tears in the faded old eyes as he took the lawyer's hand.

"Mr. Garder," he stammered, "this—happiness is all so sudden—so overpowering. It is so new to me—you see—I must wait—to understand it all." He looked at the paper in his hand and glanced about nervously as if he feared to see some one covertly smiling at him—as if he dreaded to be told it was all a joke or a dream.

"Dear old dada," said Louise, with her arm about his neck. "It is all true. You have won at last. You are a famous artist, father. You won't be too much puffed up, will you, dear?"

"Garder," said Jack, "if I live a thousand years I shall never forget what you have done."

"You, Jack!" The kindly eyes twinkled as they looked at him. "What have you to do with it, pray? There's no unrecognized genius in you, unless its a genius for causing trouble to your friends, and you don't keep that out of sight."

"Mr. Garder," said Louise quickly, "Jack was the very first to appreciate father's work. Father, I never showed this—wait a minute." She produced her pocket-book and took out Stelwyn's check. "I have kept it ever since, Jack," she said. "There, father, tha' was for the two little pictures that Jack bought."

The old man took the check and looked at it with a puzzled expression. Then his eyes suddenly lighted. He glanced quickly at Stelwyn and at Louise—and without a word he tore the check into two pieces.

"Father!" cried Louise, "what are you doing? Let me have that." She rescued the two fragments from his hand, and restored them to her pocket-book.

"Louise," said the old man proudly, "if Mr. Stelwyn wants any of my paintings—all of them—he shall have them. With all that I can ever do I cannot repay him."

"Father," said the girl reproachfully—"did you think I would let you use the check?"

"Here! here!" said Mr. Garder, abruptly. "You are all talking about checks and paintings. Don't you care to know anything about trials and escaped prisoners and such trifles?"

They all turned anxiously toward him.

"I know you have it all fixed, Garder," said Jack, "or you wouldn't try to be so funny. What have you done?"

"I want to take Mr. Morliss and Louise home with me to-morrow. You are not fit to travel yet, Jack. You must stay here for a few days. Dolores will look after you."

Louise looked up at Jack and then at Garder with a swift glance of disappointment.

"Don't disturb yourself about me, old man," said Jack. "My lung is as sound as yours, if it isn't quite so windy. Well—when we all arrive at Compos—what next?"

"The Supreme Court," began Garder, "after having seen all those red papers that you collected, and disfigured, Jack, has issued a writ of error, and has remanded the case of John Morliss for new trial in the original court—on the ground of conviction without sufficient evidence. Judge Servem—the State's Attorney—Mr. Naylor, and the sheriff, have all perused the aforesaid disfigured documents. The sheriff is waiting to receive Mr. Morliss and escort him politely to the court-room, and when the clerk has called the case—the State's Attorney informs the Court that owing to certain new developments the State desires to enter a 'Nolle Prosequi.' The Court instructs that the entry be made, and the defendant is discharged. Mr. Morliss leaves the courtroom a free man—and with his honor vindicated. That's all."

"You're pretty well, Garder—for a lawyer," said Jack. "Louise, Mr. Morliss, our long fight is ended. Garder has won the victory for us. To-morrow if you are ready we will go home."

"I shall be sorry to leave this dear little cottage," said Louise.

"Perhaps Jack will ask you and your father to come and visit him here again some time," remarked Mr. Garder.

"If I do so, Garder, I shall invite you also," said Jack. "You have become such a humorist that you are indispensable to our amusement."

In the evening—the last evening of their stay in Mexico—they all sat together on the veranda and watched the familiar but never-lessening beauty of the moon-rise over the distant range. It was exactly a month since Jack and Louise had watched that same approaching glory on the night when Jack had spoken a farewell that was so near to being his last.

They talked quietly and softly, as if the very sound of their voices might mar the majestic harmony of the night.

By and by Jack stood up from the hammock and went slowly down the steps. Louise called to him.

"Jack, you mustn't tire yourself by walking." As he did not answer she followed him down the path—and took his arm.

"I want to look at that little space near the cliff," he said, "I have not seen it since I came to grief there. Will you walk down with me, Louise?"

"Jack, isn't it too far for you? Why do you want to go there? Doesn't it seem horrible to you?"

"No, indeed. I am fond of life, Louise, and it was there that my life was saved. Come, walk with me, little girl."

Together they passed under the shadow of the branches and so out into the light beyond.

"Yes, here is the place," Jack said, "just as still and beautiful as it was on that other night a month ago. I shall always love this spot, dear."

"Love it, Jack?" said Louise. She clung closer to his arm and glanced about as if fearing to see some dark figure spring from the bushes upon them. "How can you love this place?"

"Because it was here, Louise, that what I had been doing for you and for your father was the means of saving my life, and because—Isn't the valley beautiful now? It is finer than from the cottage. Let us sit down on this ledge of rock for a moment, dear."

She sat beside him without a word. Her hand trembled a little as he took it, but it was not withdrawn. She was grateful for the friendly shadow of the overhanging branches that kept the moonlight from her face.

"Louise, dear little girl," said Jack, "my work is all done now for your father. I feel as if my conscience was free once more—but—dear, my heart will never be free again."

His arm was about her now. She looked up with a trembling smile and even in the shadow he could see the light of her eyes. "Are you sure you are not delirious now, Jack?" she asked softly.

"I never was so truly myself in all my life, dear. Why do you ask me such a question?"

"Because—because Jack—you once talked to me like that

when you had the fever—and then you told me afterward that you meant just the opposite of what you said."

"Ah! little one," said Jack. "So you stole my secret when I was helpless—and you knew that a man in a fever must speak the truth. Do you remember, dear, that you asked me to wait for the time when you would try to thank me? Hasn't the time come?"

"No, Jack," she answered. "And now it never can come."

The light, graceful shadows of the branches swayed gently back and forth at their feet, as the soft wind whispered its entrancing sweetness to every sense. A little bird in the thicket piped a few drowsy notes and then was silent. No human eye saw them—no human ear heard their happy, murmured pledges. Only the discreet old moon, witness of so many thousands upon thousands of lovers' meetings, and yet never weary of the old, old story, looked down upon them with her tender, benignant smile, and the soft radiance of her beauty found its way to their hearts.

THE END









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